BETWEEN FURNITURE & INFRASTRUCTURE: EXPANDING DISCIPLINARITY.
Between Furniture & Infrastructure: 
Expanding Disciplinarity.

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A Research Catalogue submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for 
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Architecture & Design
RMIT University
January 2014.
Declaration

I certify that - except where due acknowledgement has been made - the work is that of the author alone. The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award. The content of the thesis is the result of work which has been undertaken since the commencement date of the approved research program. Any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Tom Holbrook
18 January 2014

Acknowledgements

I extend profound thanks to my co-directors Oliver Smith and Nathan Jones, and to all colleagues past and present at 5th Studio, who have been so generous and enthusiastic with their help over the duration of this research.

Acknowledgement is doubly made, as these very colleagues are co-authors of the body of work that makes up the subject of the research, and I am grateful to current and past members of the practice, and to former students. Particular thanks go to Mike Taylor for invaluable help with laying out this document.

Thanks go to my family, for their patient forbearance of a certain mental absence, and to my wife, Melissa, for moral support and for correcting the proofs.

Final thanks go to my doctoral supervisor, Professor Leon van Schaik, who made this critical form of research possible, and to Melanie Dodd, whose idea it was.
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introduction
Contribution to Knowledge

The contribution to knowledge in the field is established by the demonstration of **expanded disciplinarity**, mapped and explored through sixteen years of evolving practice with 5th Studio, together with associated teaching and writing. This form of spatial practice - more finely articulated through the frame of RMIT's invitational design practice research approach - is highly speculative and spatially entrepreneurial.

My work has sought a heterogeneous mode of practice, encompassing strategy & planning, landscape, infrastructure, urbanism, historical conservation & interpretation, architecture and the creative reuse of existing structures. This approach operates most effectively in complex, conflicted environments and seeks to forge a compact between the very large scale of strategy and the immediate experience of concrete implications on the ground.

The approach is always interventional rather than autonomous; in dialogue rather than finite, and operates through the development of rich, multivalent narratives for change, revealing latent possibility in given situations. It is a radically contextual, located practice.

This expanded practice is set in contrast to a discipline whose societal role has been steadily diminishing and which has a tendency towards myopia and naive form-making. Counter to the tendency to divide the discipline into silos, spatial imagination is most powerful when it is highly synthetic, finding accommodation between infrastructure, the framing of an urban situation (streets, squares, collective space) and the architecture of particular buildings and program.

I believe that it is critically important for spatial practitioners to claim creative involvement in the very large scale. In the UK, for example, the landscape is changing more rapidly than at any other time since the industrial revolution, and the effects of a changing climate will only hasten that flux.

Infrastructure is broadly accepted as the means to catalyse a sluggish economy, and will play a critical part in countering the effects of environmental change, yet this process happens for the most part without spatial consideration and the results are often deeply damaging. I explore in this research catalogue the potential of a humanised, participatory infrastructure as a mediatory framework between strategic thinking and the concrete reality of the city.
A Users’ Guide

This research catalogue plots the emergence and evolution of a form of practice that attempts to bridge between the concrete and very large scales and to push at the disciplinary envelope of architectural practice.

The document is divided into three sections. The first section describes the passage of the research, and goes on to briefly introduce the body of work produced in the first sixteen years of the practice. Two early projects, and 5th Studio’s first exhibition, open the themes of the research.

The second section explores various poles of expanded practice through reflection on case studies: the centrality of an entrepreneurial culture, the located nature of the work, in both intellectual and geographical terms, and discussion of some critical narratives as components of a working methodology.

The transition - illuminated by the research - from a retrospective understanding towards a prospective view of practice, is prefaced by an interview with the critic Ellis Woodman. This interview serves to validate the positions being foregrounded, with an emerging sense of how a greater understanding of the work has informed a more precise authorship via three live exegetic projects. The final section concludes with a conversation with the architect Shelley McNamara.

Rather than offer a separate catalogue raisonné of projects, case studies are embedded into the main narrative.
The Passage of the Research

In July 2011 I commenced a programme of structured research into the practice and its mechanics through RMIT’s Invitational Design Practice Programme. This Catalogue results from that research.

The articulation of 5th Studio’s working methods, and the definition of the ‘mental space’ that frames them, constitute a contribution to knowledge about design practice in architecture.

The research has progressed through a number of modes of reflection on the work of the practice:

- A review of the archive has been undertaken, in a process analogous to a literature review. This review has led to a comprehensive catalogue of past projects and the re-structuring of the practice website so as to make many of these projects publicly available for the first time.

- From this archive, a number of significant projects have been identified and clustered. These clusterings have been validated through seminar discussions with colleagues in the practice. The selection from the body of work has been explored via the process of presentation and discussion through structured peer review at biannual research symposia, held at the Sint-Lucas Hogeschool voor Wetenschap en Kunst, Ghent, Belgium, and at RMIT Europe, Barcelona.

figures

Fig 1. Internal seminar session with colleagues

Fig 2. Presenting to the panel at a research symposia in Ghent, April 2013.

Fig 3. Curating significant work from the archive for discussion in the Darkroom, 5th Studio’s Cambridge studio, March 2012.

Fig 4. Various projects and modes of representation assembled into taxonomies: these clusterings were discussed at a research symposia in April 2012. 5th Studio has always nurtured a diverse representational culture & drawing and modelling have a high status as design tools.
A sample of key projects and characteristic modes of representation (paradigmatic drawings and models) were curated and assembled in the practice's Cambridge Studio, where it formed the basis of internal reflection and discussion on the work. The exhibited material also provided a focus for a visit to the practice by my Senior Supervisor, Professor Leon van Schaik, in March 2012. On this occasion, number of completed projects were visited across Cambridgeshire.

A review has been undertaken of critical writing on the work of the practice, my teaching studio (peer review), and of my own writing on the work of others. Much of this material has also been made available on the website.

A ‘community of practice’ has been identified and reinforced through discussion. A blog has been set up as a means of establishing a sustained dialogue with peers, and that critical dialogue has been extended through review of the work of others in journals, and in extending collaborative projects. My community of practice is discussed in the section on the ontogeny of 5th Studio, and in the interview and conversation sections in the latter part of the document.

The research process has revealed or made explicit certain themes that have underlaid various projects and which run between, and resurface through, a section of the practice's body of work. In the forthcoming pages these themes are illuminated through discussion of clusters of projects.
Fig 3. Project discussed in Chapter 4

GV * Project discussed as Case Study
In my first GRC presentation I described the ontology of the practice over the last 15 years. I introduced a purposefully heterogeneous portfolio of work (spanning S,M,L,XL) through two emblematic projects - the Creative Exchange and the Lea River Park.

A proposition was made for the focus of the doctoral research, with the key theme being an emerging position - developed through elements of the practice's work and through my former teaching studios - on the relationship between architecture and infrastructure. This would develop enquiry into the architect's role in addressing the very big scale while drawing on particularity, countering, for example, Koolhaas' "Fuck Context".

The presentation concluded with the proposal that I return to the practice's show, Presences, at the Architecture Foundation in 2001, and in particular to two key essays commissioned for the catalogue of that show - Fred Scott's "Notes on New and Old Work", and Peter Carl's "Impresences of the World". The essays - the first on intervention, the latter on culture as deep context - seem to frame a space which has been important for the practice.

The catalogue itself was conceived as a version of Duchamp's Boîte en Valise, and this idea of presenting a fragmentary microcosm of the work might become a useful model over the course of the research and a revisited mode of presentation.

2 December, 2011
Proposals for Research post-GRC 1

In my second GRC presentation I presented testing of the research themes against a wider sampling of projects from the practice's oeuvre. To initiate this, a selection of key representations (including drawings and photographs of completed projects) were matched to some rough & ready taxonomies, testing a heterogeneous output against common themes (City Servicing, Ready-Mades, Inceptions, Assemblage, Contaminated & Overlaid Fields).

This exploration was developed into a wider trawl of projects resulting in a 'pin up' of work in the Cambridge studio, which coincided with a visit of my Supervisor, Professor Leon van Schaik, to the studio. Some representative completed projects were visited during this visit.

The pin-up was used as the basis of a number of discussions in the practice, including an internal seminar presentation and discussion prior to the GRC.

21 May, 2012
Proposals for Research post-GRC 2 - DRAFT

Proposal paper for research following the first Practice Research Symposium, Ghent, November 2011

Proposal paper for research following the second Practice Research Symposium, Ghent, April 2012

Storyboarding process in preparation for the third Practice Research Symposium, Ghent, November 2012. A pin-up and discussions with colleagues in the studio are then reflected upon in the sketchbook.
Mapping the components of the research process, including reflection and assembly of the work into a more formalised oeuvre, exegetic projects, and outward testing of emerging themes, for example, via a series of public lectures given at various universities in 2012-13.
Oliver Smith and I founded 5th Studio in May 1997.

Smith has a background in the firms of James Stirling, Michael Wilford and then MacCormac Jamieson Prichard. I had set up my own practice, having originally come to architecture from a background of work in the theatre and film, with roles ranging from flyman and carpenter to scenic artist.

The firm was set up to act as a vehicle for wide-ranging practice and the ‘5th’ of the title references the ‘five scales’, from furniture through to landscape. The practice’s work is intentionally heterogeneous and diverse.

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The early years of the practice were supported by studio teaching at the University of Cambridge Department of Architecture. Through that relationship a number of studio members joined the practice, and summer jobs have evolved to senior positions. This foundation has resulted in a very stable working team with a high degree of implicit orientation to working attitudes and methodologies.

As determined generalists, design work has always sought to be heterogenous: to have a fluid identity which is not formally or materially linked. The practice does not have a ‘house style’, but rather ascribes to James Gowan’s dictum of ‘the style for the Job’.

As a vehicle for exploring the discipline in diverse ways, the focus of the Directors has been to develop different strands of enquiry within the practice. With his roots in the work of Stirling and MacCormac, it is not perhaps surprising that Smith has nurtured his interest in building fabric, and in particular the challenges around reducing the carbon impact of buildings in the environment.

Via my graduate studio teaching and through the evolution of project work I have developed a particular focus on the disciplinary involvement in the very large scale of strategy, landscape and infrastructure.

Over sixteen years, the practice had expanded across two studios (London and Cambridge, UK) and had grown to the point where it was no longer possible for the two original partners to have a full involvement in each project. Nathan Jones joined the firm in 2007 as Director of the London Studio, bringing to the practice his comprehensive and forensic design skills.

From the early days of the practice, the establishment of an œuvre, which defined 5th Studio’s approach, has been critical. Growth has forced us to articulate more explicitly the nature of the coherence across the body of work, as more than the sum of all the individual projects.
Fig 1.

Fig 2.

Fig 3.

Fig 4.
Notes

2. 5thstudio.co.uk
3. ibid.
4. The term ‘community of practice’ is discussed by Leon van Schaik in Mastering Architecture, pp94-109.
5. The Blog is titled Infra_action; the blog aims to address the nature of the relationship between architecture, urbanism and infrastructure. Other practitioners have been invited to contribute. These contributions might take the form of observations on the pathology of infrastructure and the city. Posts might offer mediatory examples between architecture and the city. http://5thstudio.co.uk/?page_id=2481
early work

Two early projects, and 5th Studio’s first exhibition, open the themes of the research.
Presences

In the Spring of 2001 5th Studio mounted an exhibition entitled Presences at the Architecture Foundation's old home in the basement of Alison and Peter Smithson's Economist Building, London. The exhibition was the result of a collaboration with the artist Paul Coldwell.

The Architecture Foundation show was the first opportunity to assemble the work completed in our first four years of operation as a coherent oeuvre. Some twelve years on, the themes set out for that exhibition seem remarkably consistent with strands drawn out of the practice's work through the research.

The catalogue accompanying the show included essays by the exhibitors, plus invited contributions from my mentors and former tutors, Peter Carl and Fred Scott. The essays explored the theme of 'Presences': architecture understood as an interventional activity, in dialogue both with the physical conditions of the particular, as well as the cultural milieux with which the work engages.

Two key projects framed that first public presentation of the young practice's work: Eden Street, and Fen Ditton. These projects are documented later in this volume, together with the design of the exhibition installation for Presences, itself an adjustment of the gallery space. Both projects involved the establishment of a rich infrastructure; on the one hand, an intervention in a semi-derelict house, and on the other, the plan for an urban extension to the city of Cambridge. This combination of design from the scale of 'transformatory furniture' through to an engagement with the very large scale of landscape and strategy in Cambridgeshire's fenlands already establishes a trajectory critical to 5th Studio's work.
The Eden Street project was typical of that time - our early clients were, like us, surviving a recession and buying their first houses with barely sufficient funds. Projects of this period often involved a staged strategy for improvement in affordable chunks, a sequential discipline which became a key part of the practice's culture.

The project was described thus in the Architects' Journal:

Working to a tight budget, the architect’s first task was to stabilise the building. Long-term plans allow for an extra bedroom and a new bathroom. For the present, these have been preceded by a strategic staircase which weaves in and out of the structure like an optical puzzle by M C Escher. The architect describes the concept behind the staircase as ‘a distillation: reduced to its basic elements of tread and riser; like the smoke-stair Mary Poppins climbs in the eponymous film,’ and sees it as ‘a disturbance, a ludic contamination of the division between parlour and back room’.

As this passage notes, the stair was developed as a ‘contamination’ of the previous social divisions of the Victorian house. Set perpendicularly to the former stair (removed, before our involvement with the project, by a disgruntled builder) which once rose from the lower level of the back room to negotiate three awkward split-levels towards the front of the house, the new stair begins in the front room and replaces much of the central division of the house. An intermediate landing formed in glass gives onto a room which projects through the party wall into the next door property as a flying-freehold, and the future bathroom at the back of the house. A further flight rises to the front bedroom, its stepped underside reappearing in the front room below like a puzzle.
Eden Street was the first of a series of projects which, in a very direct way, explored a contemporary intervention in a house as a violent upheaval, introducing into nineteenth century fabric quite new social and spatial relationships. In a reaction to what we regarded as clichés of modernism - the fetishisation of detail, the boutique introduction of expensive materials - this group of ‘ruin’ projects also bore a debt to both the theoretical work of Dalibor Vesely and to George Perec’s consideration of everyday elements like the staircase as a form of social infrastructure. The project also directly references Marcel Duchamp’s savage use of wit, and his notion of ‘delay’: a fascination with the incomplete, the inclusion of a ‘particle of ambiguity’.

These early projects were quite often developed on site, combining an in-depth understanding of the host structure (historical research, measuring the physical fabric for a drawn survey, construction of study models), with an improvisatory, contingent response. In the essay written for Presences, I describe the irony of taking up a series of detail drawings ‘after the fact’ to suit the publication routines of a German architectural magazine.

At Eden Street, the desire to condense a staircase to its essential elements required a combination of structural ingenuity and empirical testing with a joiner with whom we worked regularly. The introduction of structural glass is another motif which appears in later work, but which here, with a shoestring budget, was working right on the edge of what was possible. After completing the photographic shoot, our photographer - David Grandorge - assured us that what we were engaged in producing was ‘hairy-arsed modernism’ – a description that delighted us and which stuck for many years.
The plots themselves were subdivided by party walls into a variety of house arrangements, from tall family houses to courtyard dwellings with mews annexes. The split-level relationships of the Eden Street house reappear in the Party Wall houses.

One edge of the settlement is delineated by a water tower and aqueduct which, together with a ‘floating park’ (a landscape bordered by water), create a sequence of public infrastructures connected to one of the three primary schools.

References for this work ranged from Florian Beigel’s Brikettfabrik Witznitz, published the previous year, with its discussion of the landscape drawings of Paul Klee, through to landscape-scaled structures such as Atelier 5’s Siedlung Halen, which influenced the densest areas of the new settlement.

The ambition was to create a settlement plan, taking the logic of land drainage and plot division as a means to create a sufficiently robust strategy to resist the vagaries of multiple house-builders developing over time. The infrastructure introduced (drainage, reed-bed remediation of grey water, a section of relief road with river crossing, bus network, water supply) is used to create a rooted landscape structure, as strong as that of the old village of Fen Ditton beside the river.

This project reappears in current work to establish a strategy for North Cambridge.

At around the same time as the project in Eden Street, the practice was approached by a national housebuilder to design some ‘vernacular’ house types for a mixed-use development including 2,300 houses on the greenbelt encircling the north-eastern edge of Cambridge. Knowing that their desire was for the pastiche ‘vernacular’ so evident on the edge of most English towns, we proposed instead to revisit their masterplan: a curvilinear parody of an organic rural settlement, with kidney-shaped enclaves of semi-detached housing.

The site is the closest that the Fenland gets to the city. Most of the Cambridgeshire Fen is systematically drained marshland at or below sea level, and we identified the relationship between water and land as being an ‘authentic’ vernacular of fen settlements, and that this could be used as a key means of ordering and giving identity to the new development. Having worked on the project for a few weeks, we presented an alternative masterplan to the client and the rest of the design team, fully expecting to be sacked. The presentation concluded with a long silence before a general acknowledgement that the project had been suffering from a credibility gap, and was re-energised by our re-thinking of the strategy.

The strategy established a development grain across a great agricultural prairie at the back of the Cambridge satellite village of Fen Ditton (Dittone: ‘the village by the ditch’), working from the remains of Fleam Dyke, an Iron Age defensive earthwork. The site was thus divided into plots, using what remained of a field grain, and the land drainage structure. Each plot was bounded by a dyke, which controlled rainwater and ‘grey water’ drainage, the alignment of which also established cycle routes around the site, and into Cambridge itself along the river.

Figures

Fig 1. Fen Ditton. Axonometric - Party Wall House.

Fig 2. Florian Beigel & Philip Christou with Architecture Research Unit, ‘An architectural landscape of activity fields’, Regeneration Design of the Brikettfabrik Witznitz, Borna, Germany. 1996. Design drawing of the History Field with partial re-use and rehabilitation of several large disused factory buildings, forming a public courtyard with remains of former building foundations and a new earth ramp.

Fig 3. Atelier 5’s Siedlung Halen, Bern.

Fig 4. Masterplan drawing
Fig 1.

Fig 2.

Fig 3.

Fig 4.

Key

a. water tower & aqueduct
b. primary school
c. 'floating park'
d. reed beds as buffer to highway
e. river Cam and river meadows
f. original settlement of Fen Ditton
g. fen dyke
h. secondary school
i. guided busway and town centre
j. typical block
k. northern edge of Cambridge
Fig 1. The urban extension set between the historic core of Cambridge and the fenland system to the north east. The shadow delineates the greenbelt around the city.

Fig 2. View: water tower, reed beds and ‘floating park’

Fig 3 + 4. Typical block explored in model and isometric drawing.

Fig 5. Axonometric of the school, aqueduct, water tower and ‘floating park’.

Fig 6. Exploratory view of the primary school set in an orchard with an aqueduct.
Key
a. drainage dyke and cycleway
b. orchard / allotment plots
c. mews housing
d. courtyard housing
e. apartments / sheltered housing
f. party wall houses
g. low speed shared surface
Notes

2. George Perec; Species of Spaces.
an entrepreneurial culture
“You’ve talked about operating as a generalist, about working across scales, an infrastructure designer: entrepreneurial, proactive... In referencing the Adams’ Adelphi - where they were also developers and builders - you reference a period before the discipline ringfenced itself. You are very much the architect, but you are questioning the boundaries in terms of how you would situate yourself with the disciplines around infrastructure”

Professor David Porter, panel observation
Practice Research Symposium, Ghent, April 2012
An Entrepreneurial Culture

In this section I hope to demonstrate, through reference to the body of work, that my approach as a practitioner has sought to expand a disciplinary role beyond an autonomous architecture to a more provocative and multiple position.

This expanded role seems to embrace what one might call the political forces influencing a project, through openness to the contingent and adaptive dimensions that shape its progress, including economic and social narratives at both macro and micro scales.

The section commences with discussion of an early project, and posits the Adam's Brother’s Adelphi as an example of a mediatory structure between architecture, urbanism and infrastructure.

The section concludes with the presentation of two emblematic strands of work for the practice: the Lea River Park, and a cluster of projects that explore the spatial / urban conditions for supporting creativity, most explicitly developed in the Creative Exchange project.

As a young practice in a growing city, the availability of clients with houses needing refitting was not an issue - but the maintenance of large-scale work to accompany it required the development of a propositional culture.

“The directors say that their architecture is both a ‘propositional’ and a ‘prospective’ activity that has encouraged the office to invent projects on a larger scale than the small domestic work usually available... What is most striking about 5th Studio, apart from its general standard of design confidence and competence, is its entrepreneurial, pro-active stance.”

The development of a spatially entrepreneurial outlook was partly driven by the desire to win new work at a larger scale, but also reflected and responded to a frustration with the lack of connection between the commissioning of architecture through particular projects and a comprehension of a wider landscape or strategic endeavour.

Contemporaneous with the project in Eden Street (discussed at the beginning of this document), was a deepening interest in a neighbouring city park - Christ’s Pieces - and in particular how the park’s evident dysfunctionality might be re-thought by addressing various issues in a more holistic way. Characteristically, a broad-ranging approach was adopted, from development propositions, the use of the project as a teaching platform, through to the introduction of a seditious ‘foundation myth’ for the park.

Responses to a Council consultation process on the future of the park was used as the vehicle to introduce a richer reading of its history: a means to resist the municipal underplaying of its potential. This project was used as the basis of a teaching studio in 2001.
At the end of the park is the city's bus station, cramped onto half the site area it requires and enclosed, at that time, by a half-vacant 1950s shopping arcade called Bradwell's Court. The arcade had become the sole route connecting the two burgeoning retail centres of Cambridge, as established by the city plans of the mid 1960s. From being something of a backwater, this route had become a grim dumbbell, central to many people's experience of the city.

Realising that the potential to sort out the bus station lay in a holistic rethinking of this whole urban block and park edge, we invited the city's chief planning officer, the owners of Bradwells Court, the bursars of the two adjacent colleges, and the operator of the bus station to a workshop at which we demonstrated the mutual benefit and potential of a broad restructuring strategy beyond the confines of their individual estates.

This brokering of numerous divergent interests around the potential of a coherent spatial solution was clearly effective at unlocking what seemed insuperable issues - although at the time we were not regarded as plausible agents to enact the proposals, some of which were seen as too politically contentious to even entertain. This session prompted the City planners to produce a Development Brief for the area, and the developer, Land Securities, went on to redevelop Bradwells Court, in connection with the two colleges, using another architect.

The project developed through frustration with the environments resulting from poor planning, and the strange myopia of Anglo-Saxon attitudes to development. Our perception was that understanding the context in its full complexity, and using that to establish a stronger place via a rich narrative, had the potential to resolve a number of critical problems.
As a reconciliatory model between infrastructure and architecture, the Adams' Adelphi Project has become an important precedent model and reference, and has been discussed as such in the Practice Research seminars. It is useful to describe its relevance here in view of the light it throws on current development practice.

Emerging at a time when the profession of architecture had not yet gelled, the Adams brothers' tenacious role in the project and its emergence is particularly wide. What orientates the project is the potential to create a social condenser: a new piece of city which has the capacity to mediate between infrastructure and the urbane.

The four brothers (three architects and a banker) had built in Scotland and elsewhere, but were looking for the opportunity to make a project with impact in London. Robert Adam had been particularly inspired by the ruined palace of Diocletian at Split, encountered and painted while on his Grand Tour. A proposition emerged of an antique palace, reinterpreted for the Thames riverbank as a location for London's commerce and emerging bourgeoisie.

As the artery connecting Westminster with the City of London, The Strand is particularly fertile territory. Over its history this location has been a crucible for generating ideas about cities: from governance and the rule of law in the Inns of Court and the Temple, through to a notable concentration of new urban typologies and practical ideas on urban improvement.

From the medieval period there had been a series of palaces along the Strand: the powerful of Europe needing representation here to be part of London's political milieu. By the middle of the Eighteenth century these palaces had gone, and the Strand was 'untidy and malodorous'. The brothers took a 99-year lease on a piece of land called Durham Yard on which they laid out a city block with twin aspects – a quay against the Thames (then the engine of London's economy in terms of both globalised commerce and transport logistics) with a series of cave-like warehouses and internal roads and a series of streets running off the Strand, with 4-storey houses each having two storeys of cellars below to house service accommodation.

The houses were finished and decorated by some of the finest artisans in Europe, and they were joined by coffee houses, a tavern, a hotel, accommodation for an emerging professional class and the then-youthful Society of Arts. The Adams' proposition was a very large mixed-use structure that reclaimed the riverbank, using the section like an occupied hillside to build a great deck with the warehouses below and terraced houses above of highly sophisticated refinement. In this way, it took a position between the river and the Strand and turned it into a social structure: the working Thames below and the new artistic upper class in the houses above. This development was the first time the term 'terrace' is used to describe the division of a palatial block into separate houses, perhaps inspired by the formation of what was literally a terrace above the river.
The proposition of the Adelphi depended on the Adams brothers persuading the avant-garde of London to leave the fashionable West End to colonise the working edge of the Thames – then a logistical territory, perhaps equivalent to a major rail route or airport today.

The Adelphi development is fundamentally a speculation. Steen Eiler Rasmussen makes this observation, with an emigre’s perceptiveness:

This enterprise is very characteristic of England. It shows us a grand speculation with enormous profit in view but also enormous risk. It is quite different to speculation on the continent which are generally mere speculations in a rise of ground value. This is speculation in fictitious values... In the case of the Adelphi, the commercial idea is no less grand and full of imagination than is the artistic one... it was just as much a finance-fantasia over risk and profit: the financier was the artist and the artist a financier.

This creative speculation is something very English, and it is no less typical that when it turns out a failure, the enterprise is saved by a lottery...
Ongoing work on this project, spanning over seven years, connects strategic thinking with highly practical problem solving in one of London's most complex post-industrial landscapes.

Our involvement spans strategy, policy-making, public advocacy, programming, landscape and architectural design, project management and realisation.

The project was won at the beginning of 2007. It was immediately apparent that, despite the pre-crash optimism of the time, and a substantial budget allocation for the park, the proposition was inherently different to the concept then emerging for the 2012 London Olympic Park.

The Olympic Park was already established as a managerial problem. It had in place its encircling blue fence, a huge budget and special planning and land assembly powers. It also had a highly defined programme of international-standard sporting topographies, and a date by which it needed to be complete. In contrast, the territory for which we had been commissioned had few of these certainties.

The Lea Valley had been identified as a potential landscape resource for London in the 1944 London Plan, drawn up by the planner Patrick Abercrombie: “Every piece of open land should be welded into a great regional reservation, no open land, whatever its present use, should be built on.” Some seventy years later, this territory is still not possible to navigate in a continuous way. Post-games, the Olympic Park allows access to a further section of the valley. Our project – which we eventually named the Lea River Park - completes the final two-and-a-half miles of valley as the last section of the 26 mile long Regional Park, which stretches from the edge of London’s encircling Green Belt in Hertfordshire to the River Thames.

Assembled over a few months in late 2006, the original bid panels for the project - illustrated opposite - intuitively frame a set of propositions for the creation of the park which still pertain with remarkable consistency, namely:

- The idea of the valley as a Cornucopia: that the park would find its animation in the role that the valley has traditionally played in provisioning London.
- That the emerging design would work with the valley as found, through ‘reactivating latent and existing topography’, and that ‘through the interplay and synthesis of multiple concerns, a vital public ground will emerge’.
- That the park will be established over time, with the inherent duration of organic landscape development, and in dialogue with change on the valley edges.
- That the park would be effectively established through a combination of top-down activation, enabling bottom-up inhabitation.
The basic park structure will be established from the valley tradition of control of water. Buildings and foundations that are not capable of physical re-use will be demolished, and their spoil used as the base for particular growth. Planting will be selected to aid remediation of the ground where it is polluted. In this way distinct areas will be organically established, marking what already exists.

In an even more fundamental way, a successful park will build from engagement with its future users, from local allotment societies to farmers’ markets and the incorporation of institutions like New Spitalfields market. We plan to find models and typologies that enable local communities to get involved, from waste recycling to modified supermarkets. The park will have ideas and things that people can take home with them.

Our approach to this study is therefore rooted in an understanding of the historical fabric of the Lea Valley and in accurate analysis of its current use. In the synthesis of what new urban possibilities exist and how strategic linkages may be made in order to enrich the public realm through a major new London park.

The Valley currently and historically has been associated with stink industries, disease and corruption. The future will be fresh, but we aim to work carefully with what is already there, reactivating latent and existing topographies. A proposition for this key city territory will grow from investigating and understanding possibilities and issues at a number of levels - it is through the interplay and synthesis of these multiple concerns that a vital public ground can emerge.

We propose that, as part of the broader valley, the Lower Lea Valley park is conceived of as a CORNUCOPIA - a place that explores humanises and celebrates the systems that support the city. A ‘place of plenty’ or an edible part of the city, the theme would bring existing and new infrastructure into a territory which inspires the park’s visitors and instils a sense of what the Valley draws on as a resource hub.

The Cultivated Wild

Localismo

Italians call Localismo a local sufficiency culture about producing food, about recycling waste, about energy creation and about invention and creativity. The park would be a major ecological instrument for London.

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A Transformational Landscape

From the London Plan onwards, the idea of a continuous parkland in the Lea Valley has been embodied in planning documents, but the physical reality on the ground is highly problematic. The Lea valley is border country, with the river acting as a riparian administrative boundary along its length. Resulting political division has been reinforced by informal backland uses, many of which have discouraged access, and have contaminated both the ground and the river.

The valley has been modified over time: first by marshland reclamation and the introduction of milling by the Abbey at Stratford, then as a instrumental topography, occupied and shaped by city-servicing infrastructures over two millennia. These infrastructures have introduced physical fragmentation - a landscape of fenced, discontinuous monofunctional compounds. Almost all of the land identified for the new park is currently occupied by metropolitan-scaled infrastructure.

This is where London is expected to grow: an additional 40,000 new dwellings are anticipated in the current London Plan, which, together with the Olympic Park, will completely change the valley context. Existing deficiencies in public space and connectivity in this part of East London will become even more acute, so a new park - fully integrated into the urban fabric that surrounds it - is a necessity. As with the development of other great parks in London, the strategy established for the Lea River Park does not solely address issues of landscape, but also ones of urbanism: the park must guide and set the context for new development in the valley.

The challenge of the Lea River Park is the transformation of this backland quality to create a new foreground for London, turning a working landscape into a new public space.
A Productive Landscape

From the early 12th Century, Stratford Langthorne Abbey began to reclaim marshland. The Abbey was joined by mills, orchards and market gardens along the fertile river valley...

An Instrumental Landscape

...from the 18th century onwards the Lea Valley was a key site of London’s economic development. The present landscape is shaped by technical processes and infrastructure. Gasworks, power and sewage infrastructure, reservoirs, major highways and rail lines, wharves, docks and tunnels establish a purposeful topography of problem-solving technical enclaves, each one fenced and autonomous...

A Public Landscape

...Two millennia of land-use have created a remarkable valley, but also a landscape which is inaccessible, hard to navigate, monofunctional and certainly not public.

The Lea River Park will transform this working landscape into a new public foreground for London, animated by the traditions of provisioning the city.
Working with what Exists

In approaching the problem of a transformational strategy realised over time, we were conscious that masterplans often suffer from acting as an end in themselves, being either too prescriptive or too vague, and becoming rapidly out of date and irrelevant. Recognising that the Lea River Park is a complex project that will take many years to come together, we have established a way of describing the park which is hopefully more resilient and that has the ability to absorb change, failure of parts, and inevitable future shifts in focus or funding.

The Lea Valley is a made landscape, which plays an intimate role in provisioning the city around it. Naturalistic landscape scenography is not appropriate here, but rather park space is created from adopting and ‘contaminating’ elements of infrastructure and monocultural land uses which have had free reign in the valley, forcing them to culture richer, more urbane role. Elements such as railway tunnels, by-pass structures and gasholders are co-opted into making places for a day out in the valley.

The park centres on the River Lea, the meanders of which link all its key spaces. Since London’s establishment, the valley has been a provisioning ground for the city. The Lea River Park is conceived of as a cornucopia - a place that explores, humanises and celebrates the systems that support the city.

Early pieces of infrastructure are regarded as catalysts for converting what is currently land used for gas storage, sewage pumping and transport infrastructure into diverse park spaces of the Lea River Park: turning what is an industrial backwater into the foreground of a new public space which people can start to access and use.

Because of the physical fragmentation of the valley, and its occupation by enfenced technical monocultures, this is a territory with no natural constituency. Many local residents along the margins are surprised to find that they live in a river valley. With few champions the challenge for the project is the establishment of a strong support base to ensure political momentum can be maintained.

The original client – the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation – was inclined towards a top-down managerial operation, but less savvy when it came to developing relationships on the ground. Yet it is precisely this soft infrastructure which can be more nimble and create an impact more quickly.

The resilience of the project has depended on adapting our approach from top-down regeneration and strategy to one of being highly responsive and able to channel available amounts of funding to solve localised practical problems.

LEA RIVER PARK DESIGN FRAMEWORK FEBRUARY 2008

Fig 1. An oblique aerial view up the Lea Valley from the confluence with the river Thames illustrates the dominance of infrastructure, released from more urban engagement either side of the valley.

Fig 2. The image of a siege-tower is a useful analogy for how the project intends to ‘contaminate’

Fig 3. A series of diagrams showing the co-present conditions of the river valley.
The River & its Banks
Infrastructure & Landmarks
Destinations
Access

The Park Layers
Valley Drainage
Catchment
Ecology
Cornucopia

Fig 1.

Fig 2.

Fig 3.
Since 5th Studio’s original appointment our role on the Lea River Park has evolved, with dramatic shifts in the context for the project. From the development boom in which we were commissioned, the financial crash has altered government funding of public projects, and the speed of development on the valley fringes.

Political administrations have changed at both national and city level, and with that has come significant shifts in policy and rapid changes in the institutions who were acting as clients or key stakeholders.

Against this background has been the waxing and waning of the political regard for spatial planning, from the powerful influence of planning bodies like Design for London and the Olympic project to the current administration’s antipathy to planning towards laissez-faire policies.

This extraordinary flux has been further exacerbated by work in a territory which, by definition, has no constituency: indeed it is a landscape that has repelled colonisation. At times we have found ourselves sole advocates of the project.

Conversely, procurement rules governing public money have meant that with each new stage of the project we have had to bid in an open market situation with the continuity of our involvement threatened, or at least our legitimacy as continuing authors of the project.

The passage of the project has been complicated through a problematic relationship with the landscape architects we had invited in as partners. For the original bid we invited the landscape practice Field Operations to collaborate with us. They pulled out, and needing a plausible alternative, we approached German landscapists Latz und Partners, whose Landschaftspark in Duisburg we had referenced as an exemplar of the transformation of an industrial landscape to parkland. Initially involved only as a ‘critical friend’ for the development of the Design Framework, the relationship was renewed for the subsequent bid to realise the first phase of projects, and at this point the client asked that the lead role was taken by a landscape architect with delivery experience of parkland.

What transpired was that the team at Latz und Partners was neither adept at strategy nor nimble with practical detail - the twin skills we had developed to address the poles of this demanding project. At the same time, the complex and divergent client group became increasingly distracted by the approaching Olympic games, the realities of budget cuts and existential threats to their organisations. These twin negatives eventually drove the project into a stall.

The original client - the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation - confident that they were dealing with a fully-funded capital project, neglected the creation of ‘soft infrastructure’: the construction of a constituency to evangelise and protect the project. When that client was closed by Government the project reverted to City Hall, where it languished, its funding returned to Mayoral coffers. Without a commission, from Spring 2012 until the following year we campaigned to keep the project alive, using press, social media and through canvassing politicians. A meeting with Daniel Moylan, a maverick politician, briefly the chair of the London Legacy Development Corporation, convinced him that they should adopt the project, despite it being largely out of their area. Since that point the project has been gradually rebuilt to its current, highly responsive state.
The images and text that formed the original proposition for the project bid embodied a series of intuitive insights on the terms in which this particular landscape might be transformed into a new park for London. Over the course of the project's development a number of different sorts of knowledge have been necessary to develop and bring to bear on the project, together with the evolution of variety of means to structure, represent and communicate our design thinking.

In his book *Spatial Intelligence*\(^6\), Leon van Schaik argues for the importance of the reintegrating of disciplinary knowledge with the conscious use of spatial intelligence in the built environment. Over the course of the research I have become aware at how multiple our role has been, in particular on the Lea River Park project, and yet how located it has been to the particular conditions of the valley. The breadth of this role combines, to adopt van Schaik's triad, 'acute observation, respect and wit'\(^6\).

At the largest scale, the project rests on the establishment of a clear strategy: the construction of a narrative with sufficient depth to establish an overarching approach. The strategy - which is constantly re-stated - sets the ambition for the project and how that is enacted over time. It interrelates how the various elements contribute to a coherence 'greater than the sum of its parts'. Because this strategy is not tied to a totalising formal idea, it is highly adaptive and can be realised in many stages.
The project is rooted, and continues to be enriched by, an intuitive, tacit understanding of the task of creating a public landscape in the Lea Valley. This tacit knowledge operates alongside the development of a comprehensive knowledge about a particular place, created by various forms of research over time. This patient accumulation of knowledge towards a ‘connoisseurship of place’ encompasses a wide spectrum: ground conditions, land ownerships, thwarted plans, desired change, latent development, technical constraints, practical dilemmas and ungrasped opportunity.

As an example, a particularly rich strand of research has been the revealing of a complex, layered flora, comprising highly localised colonisers of derelict or post-industrial land (London Pride; Saxifraga urbium). The exotica that was first introduced through escapees from dock cargoes and ballast, plants established in allotments and gardens in the area by a long-established immigrant population (Capsicum), self-seeded flora from the sewage outfall at Abbey Mills (Figs). The valley is a site critical in the development of an international exchange in plants, from John Tradescant’s first plant collecting voyages, to the East India Company’s trading of Indian opium in exchange for Chinese tea out of Blackwall. Each of these strands coexist, presenting a plurality of possible landscape narratives which fit very well into the intuitive sense that the valley has a complexity which intimately mirrors London’s own development.

Somehow, we knew at the outset that this sort of depth (presented here in terms of various dimensions of flora, but these narratives are multiple) existed in a latent sense in the valley for us to discover. The philosopher Michael Polanyi identified this tacit intelligence in, for example, the feat of medical diagnosis, or in the trajectory of scientific discovery:

We must conclude that the paradigmatic case of scientific knowledge, in which all faculties that are necessary for finding and holding scientific knowledge are fully developed, is the knowledge of approaching discovery.

To hold such knowledge is an act deeply committed to the conviction that there is something there to be discovered. It is personal, in the sense of involving the personality of him who holds it, and also in the sense of being, as a rule, solitary; but there is no trace in it of self-indulgence. The discoverer is filled with a compelling sense of responsibility for the pursuit of a hidden truth, which demands his services for revealing it. His act of knowing exercises a personal judgement in relating evidence to an external reality, an aspect of which he is seeking to apprehend.16

This close, intuitive understanding of the territory extends into a encyclopaedic familiarity with practical conditions - for example the sectional challenges of connecting one piece of land to another. Here, highly practical knowledge has allowed us to identify effective approaches or to be adaptive, knowing where things are too difficult to achieve the desired results, or where effort or funding might be applied to greatest effect.
The bridge design at Poplar Reach is a good example of this synthetic knowledge, where technical requirements and constraints are absorbed into the aesthetics of the approach. The form of the bridge developed from the requirement that the structure be being highly responsive to the presence of high-voltage underground cables, to potential unexploded ordnance from wartime bombing, to complex land ownership and boundary issues, to operational requirements of the navigation and to flood risk considerations. All these technical demands are consolidated into a structure with an appropriate and contingent character, which also references the pragmatic traditions of bridge-making in the Lea Valley: part of close observation of utility bridges, but a step away, clearly not a pure structure from engineering.

Furthermore, the bridge structure has physiognomical connection with a number of other park structures along the valley which are part of a recognisable family of interventions.

The design of this early family of public infrastructure is discussed in more detail as a case study in the next chapter.
Programming the park

In terms of representation, the use of the perspective collage allows the testing and communication of proposals for particular sections of the park, in their form underlining the transformatory character of taking an existing landscape and tuning it towards a particular prospective role. These collages have been used, for example, to explore appropriate introduction of programme and to help negotiate and establish a brief, and even a client.

Diagrams and cartography of various sorts have been critical as a means to abstract a complex topography to allow the exploration of particular aspects at any one time.

The narrative strip has emerged as an effective way to combine a close-edited narrative with precedents and various images as a honed way of communicating a proposition. We used this representational form to attempt to orientate and agree a hierarchy across a multi-headed client, each with different agendas and priorities. Narrative drawings were also used to articulate and propose a balance between conflicting demands on particular places: for example, between ecological value and cultural importance.

Figures

Fig 1. View of a visitors’ centre for East India Dock Basin

Fig 2. The components of the visitors’ centre exploded to propose use and mix of accommodation to the client group.

Fig 3. Various drawings were produced to explore and negotiate programming for East India Dock Basin, where conflict existed in the client group between needs of conservation versus facilities for visitors.

Fig 4. A narrative for how objectives might be aligned, and the budget allocated, at the basin.
Quay partially cleared for events. The Fatwalk provides key visitor infrastructure (WCs, catering, lighting). Full summer deployment provides visitor infrastructure for enjoying the whole Lea River Park. Facilities range from formal education/event spaces (the Park Hall) through to fountains, slides, zip wires and barbecues.

In winter, the quay arrangement would reflect programmed events and work with schools. The Park Hall provides a heated space for much of this. The quay is set up for a variety of activities, particularly at weekends.

The vision for East India Dock Basin strikes a balance between retaining and improving existing assets - both ecologic and historic - and introducing new functions and attractions to this unique site. It identifies areas of individual character and opportunities and seeks to tie them together into a holistic, well-measured design response that will reintegrate this gem into the fabric of East London.

A/B Report, May 2009

This strategy deals on the basis of fantastic location at the heart of London. The vision will create a place for recreation and enjoyment, but it will also provide opportunities for education and community events. The quay will be a place where people can gather, enjoy the view, and participate in a variety of activities.

The overall ambition is to create a place as a critical node in the setting of a world-class park, a popular and unique place in London. This place will attract diverse users, and it will be an important part of the city's cultural and recreational fabric.
The close observation of the changing land-use and topography down the valley developed an awareness of what programme was appropriate where, through the establishment of ‘character areas’. This enabled the project to fall into a series of autonomous projects.

These independent projects, linked by the skewer of the Fatwalk, will happen over an extended timeframe, enabled by infrastructural change and funded by enabling development on the valley edges. C5 is the only section to have been completed, with work underway on completing the Fatwalk by 2015.
The park areas drawn as a topographic grain with the river at their centre. The areas east and west, while outside the park space proper, are nevertheless regarded as ‘borrowed landscapes’, and reinforce cross-valley connections and the orientation of housing estate open space (west) and generic business park landscaping (east) towards a more coherent role within the watershed of the river valley.

View down the valley connecting the Olympic Park with the Thames. The darker ‘figure-ground’ illustrates projected development in the valley fringes, generating a new edge to the park, much as imagined by Nash at Regent's Park.
An oblique view of East India Dock Basin

An intervention in this former entrance basin to the East India docks negotiates a delicate balance between nature conservation (the silting up of the dock through neglect has created an important inter-tidal habitat) and a hidden visceral history.

The basin is the key Thames-side public space at the southern extremity of the park.

Mill Meads

Bazalgette’s ornate sewage pumping station (and Allies & Morrison’s 2004 replacement) were built in what was a meads - a floodable river pasture. Our proposition here is to follow a major capital project to upgrade London’s underground drainage system with public access to the mature landscape of the Meads. As a potential terrorist target, security is provided through a ring of fenced allotment gardens.
Canning Town

The fragmented landscapes, caught between the busy A13 road, the river Lea and the Docklands Light Railway offer the chance to form a key entrance to the park, acting as a manifold to the multiple routes south to the Thames and the Royal Docks. A new ramp adopts this space left over after transport planning and will provide improved access to Canning Town tube station. It is populated by structures to mark the maritime history of this part of the valley.

Silvertown Viaduct

Silvertown Viaduct was built as Britain’s first flyover to cope with the traffic using the Royal Docks in their heyday. The viaduct is now underused by traffic, presenting an opportunity to adopt it as a connective public resource, exploiting its pier-like qualities, and the views that it offers of the Lea Valley and the Thames at Blackwall Reach.
Case Study
Knowledge economy

5th Studio's propositional culture has been important in the establishment of certain themes in the practice over time. One of these has been a concern with the spatial manifestation of Cambridge's 'creative cluster', and the consideration of what sort of built form supports this creativity.

Since the very early days of the practice, various self-initiated projects have attempted to establish a more urbanised, polyvalent model for this economy that seeks to establish a civic culture within the city, as opposed to the high-tech business park sprawl that surrounds Cambridge.

One of the first of these projects was made as a proposal to Cambridge University Press, to use a one-Kilometer long strip of land they owned between a current and a former rail line. The proposal sought to create more contingent, low-cost working space for start-up firms, a type of space not available in the corporate science-park mode, bringing back into use redundant land trapped in an infrastructure corridor.

Much of this thinking was developed in the Creative Exchange project in St Neots, and then in a project on the edge of Cambridge entitled 'City Fringelife'. Similar concerns are evident in the City Silo project, which as a self-generated and undeveloped proposition, has a certain direct quality.
St Neots is an agricultural market town on the western edge of Cambridgeshire, strategically located on the Great North Road (the A1), the East Coast Mainline and the River Ouse.

The decline of agriculture and associated manufacture has affected the town, with much of its workforce commuting instead to service jobs in London; what was a thriving market town is increasingly becoming a London dormitory.

Within the ‘growth area’ the local authority has been expected by government to expand housing provision, and the town is growing on its eastern fringe. As a reaction to the town’s growing dependence on London, the district council developed an economic strategy structured around a desire to catalyse a local creative culture, more orientated to the Cambridge innovation phenomena.

Once appointed, we reviewed a number of potential locations in public ownership across the town to house creative workspaces in support of this economic strategy, including a decommissioned fire-station, a listed house and a former mill. We were also invited to design a bespoke new workspace building which the council planned to rent to new creative firms on advantageous terms. The building was mostly funded by government as a form of infrastructure to support housing growth.

The Council had identified a partner in the local school, who had begun teaching related courses on entrepreneurship to their older students. The school is set in mature parkland, once forming an estate around a house which was demolished in the 1960s, at which point the land was given to the town as a park.

The school has grown significantly owing to the urban transformation of the town, as it grows away from its marketplace foundation towards the rail station and points east. It had also flipped its entrance towards this direction, from where most pupils now arrive.

We felt that locating the new building in this context could be used to reconcile the school’s relationship with the park - atrophied by ad-hoc extension - and to improve the experience of arrival, which was effectively from the back, through the staff car park. In a typical act of mission creep, this led to us developing a spatial strategy for the school as a means to locate the new accommodation within its estate in a coherent way.

The limited budget and defined spatial requirements resulted in a very tight ‘net to gross’: the ratio of let income-generating space to the total area of the building. We were interested in the fact that in a shared creative building it is precisely this ‘net to gross’ space that promotes interaction and serendipity, as well as enabling the internal economy of interactions between tenants implied in the term ‘creative cluster’.

Rather than providing rooms structured along a fire corridor with inevitable division and isolation, we stacked the accommodation and created a single enclosed fire stair. What would have been circulation was condensed and coerced into becoming a shared room on each floor, orientated to the park. Structuring the building with a vertical order also allowed the creation of more public rooms for events and interaction on lower floors, with shared studio space and rooms for individual firms above, and a working garden on the roof.
St. Neots

On 16 November 2006 5th Studio took part in a tour of the town to look at the potential for future economic development opportunities in line with Huntingdonshire District Council's Creative Industry Strategy.

This document makes a response to the sites visited in terms of what seems to us to be their physical potential for supporting creative enterprise.

The locations are presented as a portfolio of possibilities, where some or all of the sites might be developed in a complimentary fashion.

key
1. Longsands
2. Brook House
3. Old Fire Station
4. St. Mary's
5. ATS Site

Fig 1.
Fig 2.
Fig 3.
Fig 4.
We were very conscious of the economy of the building, spending the budget on raw volume, to create contingent, loose-fit and generous space for the clutter of 20 young firms.

A critical issue in the project was the reconciliation of a neglected landscape with an idea of a productive economy. This continuity between landscape and building was implicit in the former house and estate which stood on the site, and the model of the English country house, at one point an equivalent typology for concentrated creativity and invention, with a range of public and less public rooms close to those demanded by the building brief.

The generic condition of a dormitory town, which had transformed St Neots, from its position as a strategically placed town with a powerful connection with its surrounding context to a banal, subtopian condition, also seemed deeply problematic in terms of the establishment of a creative economy. The building therefore proposes a critique of its surroundings towards something that seems to have been lost - a reminder of a more vital urban condition.

This was recognised in a review of the building by Peter Carl, who talks about the project establishing an ‘incipient urbanity’:

It is remarkable how consistently the centre plays on three registers at the same time: it is part of an incipient urban transformation; it is a prominent element in a landscape configuration; and it has its own business to accomplish, as the Creative Exchange. These registers are sustained on the interior, according to a diagonal organisation with entry from the east and the public rooms oriented north, to the park. The south facade above the first floor is blind, to prevent overlooking the neighbours’ gardens.

The pillars of the reinforced concrete armature avoid the corners, allowing the glass to determine the primary envelope. At the same time, the exposed concrete constantly recalls the earth and, thus, the park, which is always in view from the public rooms. The ground and first floors frame the double-height reception, which is scaled to the site and allows access to the stair through its back wall, as if stepping outdoors before ascending. This gives on to a space that acts as a reception, exhibition room and seminar room. Like the open-plan office on the first floor, this room opens to the park.

The upper rooms extend beyond the armature, gaining space, shading the rooms below, and creating a public room that acts like a small forum (in which a spigot for coffee and tea plays the role of town fountain)....

The several forces that the Creative Exchange elects to negotiate – urban and rural, natural and technical, education and service, economics and ethos, making and politics – are not, so to speak, added value. Rather it is a matter of basic honesty – these forces acknowledge the conflicts inherent in the proposition.

Once it was common, but now it is rare for one to be able to hear in a rural building the urban resonances – the deep consistency of town – of civic praxis.17

The planning and materiality of the building is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
Fig 1. Creative Exchange, west elevation. Photograph by Tim Soar.

Fig 2. Creative Exchange, at the end of a new avenue of lime trees, establishing a formal access to the school from the east. Photograph by Tim Soar.
This project developed as a speculative critique of the major redevelopment of land around Cambridge's railway station, and embodies a deeper conversation in the studio about the re-urbanisation of Cambridge's 'Silicone Fen' research and development topography.

Foster Mill is a striking example of a grain silo and flour mill located, as is customary across East Anglia, on the rail-line: a prominent concrete industrial building marking a point of mediation between the ‘fat of the land’ and the city. Le Corbusier in Vers un Architecture described the giant grain silos of North America as the "splendid fruits of a new era".

The mill finally ceased operation in 2000, and was slated for conversion into flats, as part of a masterplan by the Richard Rogers Partnership. The masterplan itself we felt to be very weak, being highly formal, and establishing an urban grain which was too coarse and too resistant to changes in economic fortune. When the financial crash came, the plots were too large for the residual market, and the realisation of the masterplan slowed to a crawl.

At the heart of the masterplan, structured around the station, is proposed a large urban square. The mill buildings form a lynch-pin of the southern edge of the square. The silo building of the mill caught fire one night in July 2010 and was largely destroyed, leaving only a 7 metre high enclosure, like the root of a molar.

The mill is a listed structure and discussions immediately began between the developers and the city authorities about rebuilding the former structure in facsimile, but as apartments, omitting the obsolete industrial role in all but a formal reference.

We had concerns about the square, which was illustrated as a vibrant urban space, but which seemed to be without sufficient elements that might help to animate it in this way. We were suspicious of what we coined the ‘lazy cosmopolitanism’ of the masterplan, which seemed to promise a congested urban culture, while illustrating an urban grain of corporate boxes with little public life.

The fire seemed to provide the city with an opportunity to grasp this urban square, and to bring to it a structure which could embody some sense of the city’s ambitions and prospective vision. If this was the opportunity for an act of curation, what might be brought to this most visible of Cambridge’s public spaces, at a threshold to Cambridge from the station? How might the city as a whole represent itself to this public threshold?

One of the more successful coups of the developers had been to persuade Microsoft Research to swap a site on the edge of Cambridge for a more urban location near the station. Although this has been embodied within a boxy corporate shell, it is nevertheless a welcome reverse of the marginalisation of the research world.

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**Figures**

Fig 1. Foster Mill, Cambridge.

Fig 2. The fire of July 2010.

Fig 3. ‘Lazy cosmopolitanism’: the square as imagined by Richard Rogers Partnership (image © Rogers Stirk Harbour).
To accentuate that - and as a provocation - we proposed a structure on the silo site which would house a dialogue centre: a central resource which acknowledged Cambridge's global connection, and which brought together the worlds of university, business and commercial research in the context of dialogue about future global change.

Structured as a series of auditoria and seminar spaces conceived of as a continuous landscape through the building, it could also house local exchange and city events, as well as accommodating, on a short term basis, particular thematic interchanges on global issues. A dense residential stack would allow short-term residential sojourns in the heart of the city while participating in conferences and events.

At its base, within the ruin of the burnt out building, would be a bar and lobby, radically open to the square, allowing an encounter between a passer-by and the highly specialised world of global research.

Rather than the blandness of private apartments, the City silo proposition attempts to restore the mill as a place of work while structuring exchange between the city and the world beyond, creating a public theatre of conflict, negotiation and collaboration. It is thought of as an expansion of the public domain.

We found that the reaction to the proposal was polite interest, but with little sense of the urgency of finding a spatial embodiment of what is a big political and social issue for the city: how to maintain momentum and relevance in a globalised and fast-moving market of research.

This response is mirrored by an ongoing project to revisit Cambridge's northern edge, which includes Europe's first Science Park, as well as the residual land which deals with the city's sewage and solid waste.

The Science Park is approaching fifty years old, and facing a number of threats to its continuing primacy as the centre of the ‘Cambridge Cluster’. In 2015, a new railway station will open – entitled ‘Cambridge Science Park’ - providing a fast link to London. Hard won, this station will provide critical new infrastructure to the north of the city, in an area which is the last opportunity for major urban growth.

The station will act as a catalyst for long-term change, but arrives in a strategic vacuum. What could be a vital reappraisal of the potential of the city's northern edge for ensuring the city's continuing vitality is in danger of being missed.

As a proposition about revisiting this marginal landscape of city servicing and anonymous research, we propose a retrofit, which radically urbanises this topography over twenty years, and welds together a territory which has public space, and a connection to the strongly figured landscape of the Fenland, which comes into the city fringe along the River Cam.

From a current series of monofunctional land uses (sewage remediation, research, railtrack, highway infrastructure, parking), a complex urban form needs to be grown.
Above: City Silo as a framing corner of the station square. The bar occupies the brick remains of the burnt silo, while the auditorium and rooms for dialogue help animate the square.

Right: Plans at key levels.

Opposite: Exploded Axonometric identifying the parts of the proposition and how it relates to the new public space in front of the station. A truly public space resolves infrastructure, civic framing of the square and streets and the contributions of the surrounding architecture.
Notes


2. This project features in my essay for the exhibition catalogue for Presences and was accompanied in the catalogue box by a drawing developed with Helen Stratford exploring a playful connection between defences on the site from the English Civil War and a memorial garden to Princess Diana.

3. Tripos Studio One, University of Cambridge Department of Architecture.

4. Land Securities


6. Panter Hudspith. See Architecture Today September 2008- the scheme is well described in this article in the context of Cambridge's urban planning, but omits our involvement as catalysts, of which the author - curiously the same one who supplied the quote above - was probably not aware), and yet the bus station remains unresolved and continues to be a problem for the city.

7. For example, Joseph Bazalgette ran his great sewer parallel to the Strand, sparing London the Cholera epidemics that decimated other European cities. The sewer project was combined with the world's first underground metropolitan railway, and an early example of a relief road in the form of the Victoria Embankment.

8. There were peculiar dispensations: one could escape pursuit for debt by moving within the precinct of the Savoy, which only lost its special judicial status in the last century

9. ‘Strand’ means meaning beach or shore

10. Steen Eiler Rasmussen: London, The Unique City

11. The project was advertised in the European Union Journal and through the selection process 5th Studio were shortlisted to five, against submissions from West 8, Witherford Watson Mann and Gillespies. In the Second OJEU competition (Autumn 2008) the shortlist included Field Operations (New York), Agence Ter (Paris) and Proap (Lisbon).

12. The Olympic Park design team at the outset was an uncomfortable alliance between Foreign Office Architects, Allies And Morrison and EDAW.
13. The Olympic Development Agency was established by Act of Parliament in April 2006. The budget for the games was £2.4Bn, rising to £9.3Bn.


15. “This government means business in delivering plans to help people build new homes and kickstart the economy. We're determined to cut through the bureaucracy that holds us back. That starts with getting the planners off our backs…”

UK Prime Minister David Cameron, September 2012.


17. Architects' Journal 13 November 2008
located practice
“Landscape is important to the way one thinks, and one’s notion of what is natural, or not. Your working territory is a made, engineered landscape, fabricated around water and infrastructure; what is natural in that landscape is not the English thing to be natural – to do with hills and sheep and thatched cottages with roses - but rather, there is a strangeness, an otherness in that landscape, which one can pick up in your work”

Professor David Porter, panel observation
Practice Research Symposium, Ghent, November 2011
Working geography & other influences

The two projects described at the outset as an introduction to the work - a staircase, and a new piece of city - stake out the span of a working territory which is sustained through the oeuvre of the practice: on the one hand incrementally adjusting or intervening within existing buildings in urban centres, while on the other hand, making propositions at a strategic scale around the margins of cities and towns.

5th Studio has its roots in East Anglia: a dense, highly urbanised landscape, which conversely also contains some of the critical establishing settings for the idea of the English pastoral in broader culture, with its highly entwined and complex interrelationships between the natural and the man-made.

This territory contains one of the highest concentrations of infrastructure anywhere, and at its margin is London, with the simultaneously destructive and nurturing gravitational pull of a great star.

One of the defining factors of this working geography is the variety of different urban and rural conditions packed densely into approximately 650 square miles. The region includes Roman settlements, ancient cathedral cities, the particular ‘knowledge economy’ of Cambridge, marginal seaside towns, major ports, experimental New Towns (the Garden Cities, Harlow), market towns and dormitory suburbs on metropolitan lines to the capital. The interstitial territory is similarly variegated, with high-ecological-value habitats often created in what were formerly industrial or agricultural workings (The Broads, The Fens), creating conflicts between ongoing production and nature conservation.

In terms of a pastoral tradition, one might reference for example John Constable’s Suffolk, John Clare’s Helpston or Humphry Repton’s landscape work. The synthetic condition of East Anglia has attracted a close concern for the reality of people’s lives in a landscape, evidenced by Ronald Blythe’s Akenfield, the close account of the life of a post-war Suffolk village, or the work of the anarchist writer Colin Ward. My father, the Norfolk-born poet David Holbrook, was very much part of this writing tradition and it suffused my childhood.

The sense of landscape as a project perhaps goes somewhere to explain the coincidence of the ‘New Nature Writers’ to East Anglia, including Roger Deakin, Richard Mabey, Robert McFarlane and Mark Cocker, or the attraction of emigres such as W G Sebald.

Humphry Repton (1752-1818), who was born in Suffolk and lived in Norfolk and Essex, was the first of the new class of professional consultants, in contrast to his contemporaries: the aristocratic Uvedale Price, or the contractor ‘Capability’ Brown. Repton’s approach was via his ‘Red Books’, where he employed ‘before and after’ eye-level perspective images as a highly propositional tool, to establish projects. His projects, like our own, tended to the peripheral land on the edges of cities, responding to urbanisation and a newly emerging relationship between city and countryside at that time. Repton was one of the first landscape designers to include infrastructure as a key component of reshaping topography.1
Describing the work of the practice in the international context of the Practice Research Symposia in Ghent & Barcelona, it became clear that this working setting was highly particular, and has allowed us access to an unusual spectrum of concern, spanning urbanity, marginality and the pastoral.

The sites on which we work tend to be divergent: either extremely engaged and rich, or peripheral and banal. Our working territory is one undergoing radical change: a change that is perhaps as profound as that encountered in Britain during the industrial revolution.

The restricted availability of land in the south-east of England, and the multiple claims made upon it, create dramas which, while played out through extreme demographic and economic phenomena, are nevertheless sublimated in contemporary architectural discourse, in its current tendency to focus on established urban centres.

To retrieve a broader conception of the intellectual realm of the discipline it has been enriching to identify an older ‘community of practice’ in a generation working in the late 1960s and earlier 70s who were concerned with the role of a wider, non-urban landscape. This generation - including James Stirling, Cedric Price and the Smithsons - also extended through critical writing: for example, Ian Nairn’s advocacy of the visceral experience of landscape in the ‘Outrage’ series of the Architectural Review.

The work of this period formed a particularly English contribution to architectural discourse, keyed as much to landscape traditions, such as the picturesque, or the scholarly historical archaeology of Rudolf Wittkower and his pupil, Colin Rowe. This period in architecture was also particularly rich with respect to working with context, and the emerging critique of modernism’s utopian and universalist claims.

The concerns of establishing an adaptive, non-dogmatic urbanism, exploring a more negotiative and heterogeneous approach to reality ‘as found’ through techniques of juxtaposition and bricolage, were an attempt to discover a non-antiquarian approach to history.

Central to this project to enrich and critique modernism was the notion of differentiation - of working with the found qualities of a place in all its complexities. The extraordinary pedagogical exchange of Colin Rowe and O. M. Ungers’ period at Cornell University in the 1970s, included both Hans Kollhoff and Rem Koolhaas among the student body, and one can trace from this period the emergence of interest in a ‘culture of congestion’ and in the development of bounded conditions.

As an example of an extension of architectural pedagogy into the realms of urbanism, planning and landscape, Rowe taught design studios during the 1970s that took infrastructure - such as New York State’s Parkway system - as a landscape instrument used to generate contrast between urban and non-urban conditions.
5th Studio are working with Urban Practitioners to develop a long term vision for St Albans, one of Britain’s most prosperous cities. Project objectives include consideration of a number of key themes:

- The City’s identity
- Public participation and involvement
- Environmental sustainability
- Equality and disadvantage
- Partnership development
- Creation of lasting structures and delivery mechanisms

St Albans City and District is designated a growth area with 7,200 new homes to accommodate by 2021. The project will look at the future of the city and how it can best exploit new opportunities for growth. The aim is to develop a strategy that guides development over the next twenty years in a way that reduces the carbon footprint of the city and provides facilities to meet the expectations of residents, business and visitors.

Councillor Melvyn Teare - portfolio holder for culture and heritage - describes the project as: ‘an exciting opportunity for all in the city and district to contribute and comment on what St Albans City should be like by 2025...helping to secure an economically sound and successful future for the city as a nationally renowned visitor centre and a great place to live’.

The study will complete in the Autumn of 2009.
Fig 1. Drawing from a Charrette held at Kings Cross, London in 2008 in which I unwittingly mirror the observations of Grahame Shane, student of Rowe's at Cornell, whose drawing Field Analysis of Central London (1971) is reproduced left (Fig 2.). The drawing investigates the interrelationship between the latent natural topography with the built topographies of infrastructure. Shane’s drawing relates stream beds to property boundaries, and the morphology of London’s Great Estates.

Fig 3, (opposite) 5th Studio projects mapped against major urban change, observed to be following the ‘Zone 2 Ribbon’ (Zone 2 being a transport fares designation which coincides with, for example, the location of key Victorian termini in the city) This exercise was undertaken to identify potential future locations for involvement on projects - a prospective mapping.
Fig 3.
My approach as a designer is informed by two strong influences from my educational background. I studied Art & Design at Kingston Polytechnic, where Fred Scott was teaching. Following my degree and conversion to architecture, I was attracted to the University of Cambridge as a graduate student by the reputations of Dalibor Vesely & Peter Carl.

While there is not the space here to do more than summarise the work of these three teachers in the briefest of terms, it is important to acknowledge their continuing influence as mentors, both in terms of the expectation that a designer should operate across the culture, and that action would recognise the complexity of the world as a starting point. To each, the role of the designer is understood as interventional.

When understood in these terms, the designer operates in the role of interpreter, situating current concerns in a superimposition or archaeology of other meanings, either evident, or latent, but also bringing into play the possibility of new meaning.

Scott's theoretical foundation lies in structuralism, particularly in the reference to typology, where structures can be related to an ideal or archetype in a work of interpretation. Scott insists that type cannot be understood in purely formal terms:

Stripping back may be thought of as consisting of an examination of four aspects: firstly, material...of what and how the building is made; secondly, spatial, concerning entrance, circulation, hierarchy and proportion; thirdly, the style of the building and the exemplars from which it derives, and fourthly the building as palimpsest... being the marks of previous successive occupations.

Scott explains his intention in writing On Altering Architecture:

As I came to understand it, intervention had tended to be a broken-backed activity: work on an existing building, to make good and to prepare it for a new intervention, was seen commonly as merely preparatory, and as such exempt from accusation, one way or the other; the purpose and outcome of this approach was to highlight the singularity of the new design. My counter argument is that the designers' attitudes...
Vesely's and Carl's insistence that architectural design should be regarded as a practical skill, in dialogue with concrete situations in the world - in praxis - has been fundamental to how I understand and approach projects. This approach can be evidenced explicitly in the Lea River Park, which directly addresses the results of several centuries of instrumental thinking, and puts into place a series of strategies for the erosion of that abstraction to create a landscape more available for human interaction and imagination.

Each of these educational mentors locates architectural intelligence as a practical interaction with radical context. In the discussion that follows I interrogate that a little more, and follow a typical design approach through a series of case studies at various scales.

Dalibor Vesely and Peter Carl had been teaching at the University of Cambridge Department of Architecture since 1978, and I joined the school in 1991, at the height of their influence there, attending the infamous MPhil seminars, which often ran late into the night.

Vesely develops typological understanding towards the deeper cultural model of the typicality of situation: the hermeneutic understanding of the typicality of particular experience, described as:

"a rich depository of experience and the result of a long process of reconciliation between complex and contradictory tendencies in contemporary urban life".

Elsewhere, Vesely contrasts engineering - with its abstraction of the phenomenal world to systems - to architectural design:

"... architectural design begins always with a vision, not of a system, but of the situational structure of the anticipated space, as well as the quality and purpose of the space seen in simultaneity and reciprocity. Architectural design remains an open dialogue between the initial conditions and the emerging configuration of space. The process is in many ways similar to interpretation in other areas of culture."

Fig 1.

Fig 2.
Design for London amounts to the most important city architects’ department in the country...a group of design-led individuals who promoted a dignified public realm for all Londoners.17

The research has identified a thread through the work which constitutes a critique of the discipline of planning, as currently experienced in the UK. This frustration with planning cultures - fatally disconnected from the concrete, fixated by management routines, and squeezed between the short term cycles of politics and capital - is shared by a generation of architect-urbanists, many of whom have chosen to become clients as a means to introduce alternative, more spatially connected discourses. Most significant of these agencies is Design for London, the mayoral planning unit, which for just over a decade exemplified an alternative approach to planning. Design for London were a significant client for our work, and this coincidence of outlook requires acknowledgement.

The Greater London Authority Architecture and Urbanism Unit originated in 2001. London’s first Mayor, Ken Livingstone, appointed Richard Rogers, (fresh from completing the Urban Renaissance report for the UK government), as the unit’s head, and the early team included Ricky Burdett, Mark Brearley and former student Eleanor Fawcett. In 2006 the unit was merged with the London Development Agency’s design team to establish Design for London, which was run by former borough planner Peter Bishop. For a period, Bishop was also Deputy Chief Executive of the LDA and built valuable political support for the unit until his departure in 2011. Thereafter, and with the disbandment of the LDA in 2010, Design for London was marginalised, and were finally wound up at the beginning of 2013.

Design for London typically worked as a catalyst on the interstices of London’s thirty-two boroughs, negotiating between agencies (including the boroughs, Transport for London and numerous other public sector and business organisations). Their involvement was tripartite: firstly in originating and guiding projects, the establishment of design briefs and the development of cross-border masterplanning and area strategies (with a focus on east London where the challenge of managing rapid change in the capital is greatest). Secondly, they directly delivered physical projects, particularly in terms of London’s public realm. Finally, the unit developed Mayoral spatial policy and strategy: for example, the Mayor’s Housing Design Guide and Climate Change Strategy.

Their sensibility was to reveal and work with what exists, and to situate themselves between the familiar planning tropes of ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’. Mark Brearley, the former head of design at the unit, locates their role thus:

“We are in the middle, because we are identifying possibilities and then trying to build them into a constituency, to make them bottom-up, even though we might have actually seeded the idea. Not enough ideas for positive urban change come fully from the bottom up. There are just not enough people around who have a clear notion of what can happen. Thoughts do need to be introduced, but I wouldn’t see this process as top-down; it’s not a crude imposition, it’s an offering up, and then building a constituency, nurturing a momentum.”18

Client, found & lost

Figures

Fig. 1. (opposite) Some of 5th Studio’s projects with Design for London: The Lea River Park Design Framework (2007); Park Royal Public Realm Strategy (2008); Stitching the Fringe (2012); Royal Docks Vision (2010); Mayor’s Great Spaces (2009); Ideas for Mabley Green (2013); Crossrail Atlas (2012); East London Green Grid (2006 on).
"The East London Green Grid will offer scope for solitude and sociability, physical activity and engagement with nature. By catering for a range of expectations and by addressing the environmental challenges ahead, it will grow to become the living thread that weaves together the communities of East London – new and old.”

Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London
Design for London gathered a number of like-minded practitioners: including East (the practice originally established by Brearley), Muf, David Kohn Architects and the landscape designers J&L Gibbons. The amount of work addressed by this group was contentious, often attracting criticism from the press, with accusations of cronyism and conflicts of interest. The existence of a unit that wanted to support long-term and careful commitment to a place, around what were often modest projects, demanded fresh skills from the discipline, and few practices were able or willing to sustain that sort of involvement. In the early years of the Architecture and Urbanism Unit these skills were so rare in the UK that much masterplanning work went to the Dutch practices West 8 and KCAP.

Design for London actively grew a more local pool of architectural talent who had the sensibilities and skill to address the emerging spatial agenda in London at that time, and it was interesting to see the resentful reaction to that from the more traditional quarters of the architectural profession. Sustained involvement by professionals is actively countered by the requirement that the public sector competitively tender services at regular ‘milestones’, removing their ability to commission and replacing that with the risk-averse regimes of procurement.

Contrasting Design for London’s role with contemporary planning, Brearley clearly identifies the centrality of the proposition:

“I do believe in the idea of following an agreed plan that has democratic endorsement, and using the leverage of public ownership of development rights to influence outcomes. But these days that’s a slightly eccentric belief, and it is far removed from the day-to-day practice. In fact planning of that type has limited influence today as there are so many obstacles to actually getting anywhere with a whole concept for a locality. So we have migrated our efforts to where we think we can still have a good effect more readily; through a more entrepreneurial, opportunistic approach, pitching ideas and getting support for them, persuading, telling stories, marshalling resources, and helping seed enthusiasm. This is a more productive way than the idea of planning familiar since the 1940s.”

This theme is echoed by a leader by the Editor of Building Design, writing in response to the breaking up of CABE:

...what we most desperately lack is local planning of a propositional kind. If we had planners capable of offering a three-dimensional vision of the city to which architects and developers could respond, the need for a design watchdog like CABE would be much diminished. At present, there is only one planning agency operating in the UK that has proved itself capable of steering the city’s development in that proactive manner, namely Design for London. (DfL is) instrumental in establishing a collective vision for the town’s regeneration and in ensuring that commissions for individual projects are awarded to some of the best architects in the country.”

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Fig. 1. A drawing exploring the topography of the Lea Valley, for which we act as Green Grid Area Advisors.

Fig. 2. Park Royal Masterplan (discussed as a Case Study later). Park Royal is a series of distinct pieces of urban fabric whose diversity is critical to its economic operation and urban character. To support this richness of place, and fit with the reality of what would make sense on the ground, the strategy proposes a number of small-scale interventions which respond to specific local conditions. This ‘toolkit’ plan assembles the different proposals, ranging from signpainting the walls of anonymous sheds through to an off-road cycle network.

Fig. 3. 5th Studio were commissioned to investigate the integration and impact of the new Crossrail station at Abbey Woods. Here adjacent development and public realm interventions combine to create an elevated station square which radically alters the nature of an existing flyover.

Fig. 4. The Crossrail Atlas attempts to provide a comprehensive description of the regeneration potential of the Crossrail project. The Atlas describes the new geography of urban change and regeneration along the Crossrail route.
Design for London acted like a guerrilla movement, seditiously implanting design ambitions into local authority work. This clandestine operation was simultaneously a strength and a weakness. With a team of under 20 and a small budget the unit nevertheless made a disproportionate impact on planning in London.

Our own involvement crossed the whole span of DfL's activities, from the work on the London Olympic Fringe, numerous masterplans (for example the public realm framework for Park Royal, discussed later), to the policy level projects: for example, the London Green Grid, the Crossrail Atlas and policy advice to the Mayor on Climate Change Strategy.

The diaspora from the break up of the agency continues to provides critical clients for the practice - including Eleanor Fawcett, now Head of Design at the London Legacy Development Corporation, and client for the Lea River Park project. Beside ourselves, Fawcett is the sole person to maintain continuity with the park project across its life.
“All of your work is in an area that has been worked and reworked and reworked. Everything you do is in a majorly contested field: there’s no such thing as a greenfield site in any of your projects... Across the scales you seem to break things down into a certain scale of block, forming assemblages in contested fields. Is it the contested field that forces that way of thinking?.. I’m interested in how you have built up this painstaking way of understanding complexity in this way: the coherence of the grain that you have developed as a response to this condition.”

Professor Leon van Schaik, panel observation
Practice Research Symposium, Ghent, April 201
The Contaminated Field

In acknowledgment of the multiple claims made for land in our working territory, and a desire to make this phenomena more explicit, most of our work involves the negotiation of what we refer to in the studio as ‘contaminated fields’. This term emerged very early on in the studio as a means to situate a desired relationship of design work within rich context.

The contaminated field acknowledges a multiplicity of claims on a particular landscape that can be brought into juxtaposition. These layers might include the uncovering of literal and physical objects (for example, the incorporation of Fleam Dyke as a means to structure the landscape in Fen Ditton), but might also reference the unrealised, the lost or the latent.

A number of projects dealing with interventions in rich contexts characteristically commence with the editing of the host context with some violence: first by ‘stripping back’ as a critique of the situation as found, then through the introduction of fragments as a means to establish a provocative dialogue between the host and the intervention.

In my post-graduate dissertation I appraised the work of the Veneto designer Carlo Scarpa, the critical appraisal of whose work I felt had been over-aestheticised, therefore missing its essential power: the violent upheaval integral to the work.

A series of early projects in the oeuvre are disruptive, using assemblage techniques to emphasise a certain awkwardness; a provocative position of the intervention with respect to the host building.

A later cluster of projects - which tend to be at the strategic end of the spectrum in terms of their scale - extends this project of differentiation, seeking to uncover and amplify particular characteristics as interventions in landscape.

Typically, projects start with an investigation of what exists, seeking to emphasise essential qualities while stripping away those aspects which obscure or normalise the potential of the site. This initial stage explores how a particular context has evolved: what forces have shaped it over time and how its particular characteristics have come about. The site’s evolution is revealed through sequential maps, historical research and physical experience of the site, and this process includes both the successive physical realities of its archeology, and frustrated potential.

The combined analysis is embodied in abstractive recordings of the site, towards a discussion of its character. From this tectonic and social reality, a narrative is constructed to both accentuate the situation and to bring into dialogue the potential new reality of the project.

The spectrum of judgements used to select what might be valuable in a contested field range from the most pragmatic and empirical to more fugitive qualities, and as such the design process typically ranges from assembling hard site data through to a more tacit understanding of what is at play.

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A series of early projects in the oeuvre are disruptive, using assemblage techniques to emphasise a certain awkwardness; a provocative position of the intervention with respect to the host building.
A client selects London buildings to purchase by assessing whether they have ‘Good bones’ allowing adaptation in relation to the orientating armature of the host.

Implied in the project of differentiation - the resistance to homogeneity - is an enjoyment of the scenographic qualities of juxtaposition, and the acknowledgement of the picturesque tradition of English landscape as a series of experiential conditions, to be encountered sequentially.

The sequential or episodic understanding of a project also becomes evident in the culture of understanding a project - in particular a large-scale project - as something that evolves over time, rather than aspiring to a fixed, ideal formal condition. This attitude, familiar to landscape practitioners who have to work with the long timescales of planting, lies behind the most distinctive work of the practice.

The opportunistic and staged realisation of a project has many roots in the culture of the practice, from the experience of theatrical production of situations through to an interest in how things might ‘come off’ - an entrepreneurial attitude to spatial possibility discussed earlier in this document.

These twin temporal dynamics, sustained long-term commitment and more expedient ‘can-do’ responses, also map to the distinct sorts of knowledge developed through the typical design process.

In terms of re-use of physical artefacts, one might be alert to fabric which is too precious, or tough to erase. This encompasses work to listed (historically protected) buildings for example, or to the prioritisation of labour to achieve the desired effect with the least resistance.

As Koolhaas has noted, the trajectory of conservation and heritage is inextricably bound up in the modernist project and an integral component of it. The confrontational position of critics like Ian Nairn in the 1960s, to propel the conservation instinct towards a richer cultural involvement in the particularity of settings, and the ingredients of place, has settled into a banality of conservation closely allied to the particular economics of property ownership as investment. What began as a radical movement (i.e. the fight to save London’s Covent Garden market from re-development) has become a deeply reactionary impulse, closed to the discipline except on the highly defined terms of established conservation practice.

The extraordinary adaptive ability of much of London’s Georgian fabric - the terraces of Westbourne Grove for example - may be ascribed to their nonspecific grain, allowing them to be subdivided into bedsits when times are hard, and to act as single mansions when the area becomes more prosperous.
Typical design trajectory of a project: in this case the re-working of a pair of buildings to create a hostel for disabled students, together with a university polyclinic.

Figures

Fig 1. A series of 1:500 sketch models test the potential ‘topography’ of the project.

Fig 2. In parallel, collage studies explore the potential of intervention to create key spaces - in this case a foyer and street entrance / elevation.

Fig 3. Sketch models at larger scale are used as tools to develop and adjust the design.

Fig 4. Axonometric projection drawings explore sequences through the building and help establish hierarchies of spaces.

Fig 5. More finished models follow at key points in the process: this model was produced for dialogue with the client and planning and conservation bodies.
We maintain that the oeuvre of the practice is purposefully heterogeneous and not driven by formal concerns, however, it is certainly the case that through the course of the research it has become apparent that our working approach to design has had consequences which exhibit a surprising consistency between projects, and that discussion of this continuity has been somewhat sublimated.

One response to emerge very early in presenting the work at Practice Research Seminars was that discourse of the aesthetic dimensions of projects had been neglected. This challenge arose at the first presentation in response to my positing of the Adelphi, and Easington House, as exemplary models of mediatory structures operating between architecture and infrastructure, and referenced in the design development of the Creative Exchange project.

The architect John Tuomey, while accepting the relevance of these precedents, noted that the distinctive character of both was the unfractured, singular element of their form:

“In your own work, you are not strongly pushing the sense of the whole. Your work comes across as being assembled out of fractured parts rather than being comparable to those precedents that you cite. Why is your work not more singular, if the things you love are like that?”

This challenge has been significant, and ultimately it is only possible to address the question through a more explicit understanding of how critical projects have developed. This chapter therefore concludes with an examination of this phenomenon via a series of case studies.

However, Tuomey's question also prompts two associated and more general responses which I would like to rehearse: 'Is the Adelphi really so singular?' and 'In any event, is it possible in contemporary culture to produce a singular architecture?'

In many ways one can see that the aesthetic upheaval emerging from the English Baroque and the Enlightenment signals the emergence of themes that continue to haunt contemporary architecture: primarily, the separation of aesthetics as a philosophical mode distinct from the rest of culture that one encounters, for example, through the work of Hume and Burke.

The Adelphi was, after all, imagined as the locus of precisely those emergent Enlightenment structures that Habermas calls “the bourgeois public sphere”

It is immensely significant that the Adelphi, with all its surface continuity, guaranteed by the Romantic attachment to plaster and stucco, was modelled not on Diocletian’s Palace, but on the ruin of that palace, and that the superficial continuity of its surface is not ‘all that meets the eye’.

The Adelphi project clearly responds to contemporaneous ideas emerging from a reappraisal of the work of Vanbrugh, who “possessed a sense not only for the arrangement and piling up of masses but what might be called architectural drama to a larger degree than any other English architect”.
The Adams brothers would have been exposed to radical landscape theory as expounded by figures like Uvedale Price, who in his Essays on the Picturesque identified its characteristic association with broken or fragmented forms, weather stains, irregularity of effects and the disposition of boundaries.30

In response to the second question, as Ignasi di Sola Morales acknowledges in his essay Terrain Vague, we no longer operate with the certainties of the Enlightenment but rather through the estrangement of the ‘unheimlich’: “Not the individual endowed with rights, liberties, and universal principles, not the subject of the Enlightenment and of the Declaration of the Rights of Man: on the contrary, here is a politics for the individual in conflict with himself, despairing at the speed at which the whole world is transformed yet aware of the need to live with others, with the other.”31

The discussion of the retreat from the singular facade in modern architecture is picked up by Anthony Vidler in his own discussion of the architectural uncanny32. To plot the dissolution of the facade he picks up on Colin Rowe’s critique of Stirling’s Staatsgalerie as a reworking of Schinkel’s Altes Museum but ‘without a facade’. Vidler follows a thread from Schinkel’s already dissolving elevation through Le Corbusier’s Chandigarh Assembly to the Staatsgalerie, referencing Rowe’s critique of that building which “… in other respects seemed to reply successfully to his general criticism of modernism, especially with regard to its replication of a fragmented urban discourse that to all intents and purposes echoes the formal project of Rowe’s own Collage City.”33.
In earlier discussion of the practice’s domestic projects I referenced the notion of ‘contamination’ as a - sometimes violent - interventional critique of the original host. This translatory attitude to existing fabric appears as one of the roots of what otherwise might be read as a ‘punk’ aesthetic, establishing as it does a vocabulary of materials which, in their nature, are fragments assembled as bricolage.

In one Research Seminar I noted the practice’s decision to cease work on domestic projects as a significant moment, and this caused some discussion. This decision was not driven by a distain for the small projects on which we cut our teeth, but was rather in recognition that the trajectory in that world, as our reputation increased, was towards the ‘boutique’ and it was precisely the edginess and essential incompleteness of the work which became less possible in that context.

The sensibility of bricolage reflects in a very direct way the desired bridge between the different sorts of knowledge in play in the design process, from the strategic through to provisional and engaged operations on the ground. Irenée Scalbert’s essay The Architect as Bricoleur acknowledges the practical wisdom inherent on the bricolage process: Bricolage cannot have a form because, to the bricoleur, it is a life process. Nor can bricolage have a philosophy, insofar as it does not lend itself to concepts and theories. Instead bricolage values flair, wisdom and forethought, resourcefulness, deception and vigilance, opportunism, skill and experience. Bricolage is a form of cunning... the bricoleur is always waist-deep in practical situations, nowhere more comfortable than between the sensible and the intelligible, between the earthly and the aerial.34

It is certainly the case that the design process and the tendency of projects to develop over long periods of time extend the contingent effects of the peripheral forces shaping the project. This temporal extension, together with the interest in multivalency, is well-matched to the episodic generosity of collage. To quote Florian Beigel:

In the discussion about the relativity of parts to the whole, the compositional technique of collage is useful as it puts emphasis on relationships of separate but dissimilar events and rather less on the ending. It has the elements of suddenness, free association, multiple meaning. It can capture the infinite. Each part has an integral value within the whole, and at the same time retains its own episodic value. There are no latecomers to a collage.35

These case studies illustrate the continuity of the 5th Studio design process from the scale of a room through to a strategy for a complex landscape.
Case Studies
1. Kensington Church Street
   An interior

2. George V Pavilion
   An exterior

3. Creative Exchange
   A building

4. City Block, Soho
   An urban block

5. Fatwalk Interventions, Lea River Park
   A landscape
This project involved the reuniting of two maisonettes in a house clumsily extended and partitioned into three separate properties in the mid-1980s.

The planning process was very difficult, with the Royal Borough's planning officers relying on formulaic rules of development: an early scheme to extend the back of the property was unsuccessful and the final scheme concentrates largely on internal modifications. The project is therefore interesting to discuss here as it solely operates within the interior of the building, but nevertheless embodies a number of ideas about landscape.

Within these tight parameters we were interested in re-discovering some sense of the scale of the house – both in terms of the obscured hierarchy of primary spaces and the original materiality, lost beneath bland partitioning.

Working around an existing stair that provides access to the top floor maisonette (under separate ownership), the new arrangement seeks a spatial openness absent from the cellular subdivisions of the earlier refurbishment.

The basement has been opened up into a single space for family living. The kitchen, laundry and shower room are enclosed by a layer of placed elements along one party wall. Transitions between public and private areas of the house are developed through layering of screens and light enclosures, rather than partition walls.

Two new staircases were introduced: an external stair, which allows access from the front garden to the basement, and a new internal stair, linking the basement, ground floor and the first floor. The staircases at basement level are twins – one internal and one external. They are both made from concrete, with support walls made from board-marked in-situ concrete, into which are fitted precast treads.

Concrete was selected as a raw, homogenous material. With an in-situ finish it would evoke the garden that we were prevented from building in, and with a precast finish it would reference the lost elegance of the original house: a combination of two types of careful making.

We worked with the engineer Sam Price of Price & Myers, who has extensive knowledge of the cantilevered staircases often seen in Georgian houses, where the ability of the treads themselves to transfer forces to the ground allows a delicacy of structure. This allowed us to make something visceral and substantial, yet light and perforate.
Fig 1. Perspective ‘pop-off’ identifying the interventions as a series of furniture screens within a cleared primary architectural space. The drawing also identifies the twin stairs at basement level, one internal, one external in the ‘area’ which provides access from the front garden.

Fig 2. An early sketch section identifies the desired quality of light and material to create a more visceral connection between house and garden.

Fig 3. The internal stair in elevation, contrasting board-marked in-situ concrete on the party wall with in-situ concrete treads.
Section through the house showing the two reunited maisonettes. Kensington Church Street is to the left.

Early diagram. The basement opened up into a single space. The kitchen, laundry and shower room are enclosed by a layer of hinging, folding elements along one party wall.
Upper Ground floor - a furniture piece establishes a dressing room corridor and en suite bathroom as a vitrine behind the headboard for the master bedroom, allowing the main volume of the room to be read at upper level.
Basement - the kitchen and utility room are enclosed behind a timber screen. A concrete staircase reunites the basement with the ground floor internally. Its twin, illustrated over, connects the basement to the street.
Basement - The screen also encloses a shower room and WC. The front window, above opens to an excavated area, with a stair up to the front garden and street.
The Kensington project was informed by work on my first house, featuring a wall-scaled door, which became a feature of a number of subsequent projects, such as Victoria Street, right.

Victoria Street - The framing of internal spaces draws inspiration from paintings of Dutch interiors and from the adjustments to my own houses.
The use of collage techniques at Kensington Church Street can be seen even more explicitly at the George V pavilion. In contrast to the interiority of the Kensington project, this project primarily involved the wrapping of a building’s exterior.

We originally became involved in Trumpington - a village directly to the south of Cambridge on the edge of a major growth area - through the development of a community infrastructure strategy. The local authority became conscious that, alongside the development of new schools, health facilities and other community facilities for the new urban development, the existing community had been rather neglected. We were therefore invited to extend our very large-scale work to include some highly practical hands-on community engagement and to consider where funds could be spent on the village’s pavilion, as they became available episodically.

Originally built in the early 1950s, the pavilion forms a gateway onto the local recreation ground, but the building had been poorly treated and maintained for many years. Vandalism and neglect had led to all but one of the many connections between the recreation ground and the pavilion building being blocked up. The hall’s french casements to the field had been removed and replaced with blockwork.

Football teams had to walk through the main space to the changing rooms, pockmarking its parquet floor and spreading mud, further reducing the building’s usefulness to the broader community. Over time, glazing had been replaced with translucent polycarbonate and steel doors guarded access. The building was dark and unloved and, to local kids and users of the recreation ground, seemed outdated and irrelevant.

From the building’s history of neglect and defence against damage we became interested in how to develop an aesthetic which worked with the materials that were generally encountered retrofitted over exposed buildings to prevent vandalism. An art & architecture fund enabled us to develop a collaboration with an artist who had formerly worked with us. Early thoughts about defensive buildings and use of camouflage or dazzle patterns were developed into a method of colouring standard multicell polycarbonate sheets. Combined with a sprayed steel mesh this gave us a layered robust but beautiful composite to wrap around both the existing pavilion, and a new Football Association standard off the peg changing room block, unifying its exterior and making something new and contemporary from the old building.
After the work - the tall window to the kitchen / café acts like a beacon. The front canopy proposes a sheltered place for local kids to hang out. On the right is the over-clad, readymade changing room.

Photograph: David Grandorge
Emerging Site Strategy

Total Units: 241 Units
Density: 87 dph

• Development of the Broadway strategy - incorporating a more autonomous E-W mews block structure that in turn suggests a more episodic sequence of public spaces framing routes and connections. Following pages map out the emerging strategy.

Fig 1. Part of the wider strategic work we were developing which led to our appointment on the very practical upgrading of the pavilion...

Fig 2. ... which included much consultation with the local community groups on what they would like the building to provide.

Fig 3. The front canopy and entrance.
Photographs: David Grandorge

Fig 4. The re-glazed elevation to the playing field protected by a sliding security gate. The changing rooms are to the left.
... the building has one final trick in store: the grille running along this elevation has been designed as an enormous retractable security gate. With the push of a button, 8m of steel mesh is sent slowly motoring along the facade until the full expanse of glazing is exposed... It is a moment emblematic of a scheme that balances the demands of accessibility and fortification with considerable invention and a great deal of charm.

Building Design, 29 January 2010
Fig 1. Site plan of the pavilion on its playing field, surrounded by council housing from the 1950s.

Fig 2. Details of the layered cladding of original building, new extension and off-the-peg changing room block.

Fig 3. Road elevation.

Fig 4. Plan of the ensemble.
The Creative Exchange project has been discussed earlier in this document in terms of its wider urbanistic scope, but the project appears again here in terms of its ambition to create a generous structure from a highly predefined and restricted brief and budget.

Our research of the typology of shared workspaces revealed a tendency towards elongated low-rise forms with sets of rooms structured along a fire corridor, resulting in a series of silos offering little chance of interaction and serendipity. We wanted to find space for interaction and mutual support, but this did not appear in the brief, and there was no leeway in the budget for additional area.

The defined areas of the programme were made into a series of scaled volumetric blocks, and it was soon apparent that stacking the programme structured the building with a vertical order: public rooms for events and interaction at ground level, a shared studio space at first floor, then individual spaces for fourteen different firms on the upper two floors, with accommodation on each floor clustered around a public ‘hall’, orientated to the park. This hall space was created ‘free’ from concentrating what would have been circulation corridor into a room.

More useful ‘free’ space was found by creating a working garden on the roof, accessed by the lift.
The brief - itself derived from a business plan commissioned by the local authority client - cut into volumetric blocks.

Left and below: models made at various stages of the design process, from 1:100 to 1:20.

The blocks deployed as the client imagined them - as a range of rooms along a corridor in a single storey building.

The programme stacked vertically condenses the corridor into a central hall, ultimately used for social interaction, ventilation and for dropping light into the middle of the plan.
Ground Floor - concierge, meeting and exhibition rooms

First Floor - shared studio

Second Floor - seven workrooms around a hall

Third Floor - seven workrooms around a hall

Roof Garden
The use of concrete forms a self-finished armature which is then subdivided by partitions and linings using the ply formwork. This reference to the making or craft of the building seems an important connection to the otherwise elusive notion of a 'creative economy', as does creating a meaningful connection with the landscape beyond.
Aware that the success of the project lay in the building’s ability to generously accommodate the detritus of around twenty creative firms, we wanted to direct the budget to making a generous armature, rather than obsess about seeking to control the fit out.

I was delighted when a passer-by asked me “is it finished yet?”, as clearly, until occupied and under the direction of its inhabitants, the building is unfinished. The letter opposite was written as a welcome to new tenants.

The limits of control were brought home by the lack of comprehension by the local authority client on how to properly market the building. They ultimately delegated this role to a building management business, who let the spaces not to creative startup firms as intended, but to general businesses looking for cheap office space. The unfinished quality of the building was not understood by these residents, and we understand that carpet tiles and the other generic ingredients of the standard office have been introduced.
In designing Creative Exchange we were faced with a number of questions: What is it that makes a workspace ‘creative’? How do we make judgements about how best to spend the tight budget for the project? How do we make sense of the building’s position on the edge of Priory Park, St Neots?

With the intention of maximising the value of what the architecture contributed, we looked at our own experience, and the sorts of spaces that we have chosen in the ten years since setting up our firm. We have always had the sense that the work we do comes from a studio, rather than an office - the clue is in our name! We would always choose an unheated wreck with nine-foot ceilings over the easy comfort of a ready-fitted office. Looking across the world’s cities, artists of all kinds are always the first to populate the fringes, looking for unusual and inspiring spaces, often left over from industry.

At Creative Exchange we have tried to create a generous building, making the floor to ceiling heights as high as we can, opening up between each floor, and between the building and the park beyond, so that the light animates the building. We have made a space which is purposefully very different to the domestic space of a house - an alternative to the spare bedroom where many businesses start up. Despite that, we did have a super-domestic model in mind - that of the English Country house, the location of so much invention over the centuries, with a mix of public rooms on the lower floors and more private rooms above, sitting in a remarkable park.

We have condensed the building, and made it vertical, turning what are often fire corridors into useful shared hall spaces on the upper floors - here we hope that different firms can have a shared space where they can support each other over a cup of coffee, or get advice on a late-night layout for a deadline. The materials we have used to make the building are left exposed - a reminder that this building is about making and crafting.

Creative Exchange has a big character: we hope that its new inhabitants will love it, and add their own layer of occupation, so that each workspace develops its own unique character within the larger community.

Tom Holbrook
Director

Creative Exchange
A Note on the Architecture
This project explores a strategy for the incremental transformation of a complete urban block, bounded by Old Compton Street, Wardour Street and Bourchier Street in London’s Soho.

Soho is on a trajectory from the heart of London’s sex industry towards prime value land. Porn shops are steadily being converted into restaurants, which command astonishingly high rents in return for their location. Former brothels now house an expansion of Wardour Street’s film post-production world.

Using extensive physical modelling to understand the complex grain, the study explores the potential for intensification of a whole urban block, with the aim of enabling the interior of the block to work as effectively as the successful street frontage, and to provide complimentary scale and type of volume to the cellular rooms available in the 17th and 18th century buildings lining the street.

Large technical spaces are required by Soho’s burgeoning media and film community, and we proposed that these form a deep block interior, with access from two new internal courts. The changing vertical grain is also recognised, with a transition from street front up to a variegated roof-scape.

The strategy allows for incremental transformation of the fabric as leases allow building work. Opportunities for new buildings and expansion are identified.

Figures

Fig 1. Part of an extensive audit of the block and current uses
Fig 2. Dense and historically precious Soho fabric
Fig 3. Design model exploded:

6. Hotel ‘special’ with rooftop pool makes a corner with a long view along Brewer Street.
5. New living spaces envisaged as a vitrine-like tower over Bourchier street, the only area of the site not currently occupied
4. A series of ‘garrets’ created along the block roofline
3. The less useful 1950s infill on Old Compton Street are replaced with bespoke buildings which also configure a relationship with the block interior
2. Internal court and connective tissue aimed at catalysing an effective block morphology

1. Large-scale internal volumes in cleared block interior create highly technically controlled spaces: providing sound stages for media use for instance.

Base - the edited state which acknowledge the high value of the existing street frontages of shops and restaurants, together with a useful grain of rooms at higher level.
The block modelled as it exists. The various ages of buildings are reflected in the tone of the wood used. Since Soho has become a carefully protected conservation area, this coding also identifies where intervention might be possible, and where it would be resisted by the planning authorities...

...‘soft’ fabric removed from the model includes two properties on Old Compton Street which were rebuilt in the 1950s, replacing buildings damaged during the Blitz.

The frontages to the block are very high value, and work well in terms of accommodating various uses that need well proportioned rooms.

The interior of the block, being largely ad hoc extension to the original fabric is less contentious in conservation terms, as well as being the least fit for contemporary needs...

The interior of the block is made more accessible by the first intervention - a new arcade running from Old Compton Street to Bourchier Street...

...which gives access onto a court, providing a connective ‘address’ to the block interior at the east end, together with new larger scaled ‘infrastructure’ found in the heart of the block, providing a soundstage and bluescreen post-production facilities.
The 1950s buildings are replaced with new buildings that create more bespoke facilities, while maintaining the street line...

...the block interior works much more vertically to complement the cellular spaces of the original fabric of the houses. A series of studios and penthouses appear at the highest level above the technical space in the middle of the block.

A yard - currently used for car parking and refuse - is identified as the location for a nine-storey residential tower. New frontages onto Bourchier Street aim to make this a more active street...

...at the West end of the block, where it meets Wardour Street, a hotel is formed, with a rooftop bar and pool joining a family of attic level fragments with connections across the upper horizon of Soho.
Case Study

Lea River Park
Phase One Projects
London

Client:
originally London Thames Gateway Development Corporation, now the London Legacy Development Corporation.

2011-2014

Value: originally £32m, now £5m.

The Fatwalk is the primary project in the realisation of the Lea River Park, connecting the Thames and the Olympic Park, as well as establishing critical cross-valley routes.

Funding for the first phase of works to create the Lea River Park was originally set at twenty-eight million pounds. A substantial portion of this funding was used to establish a continuous route through land assembly, as the backbone of the future park and was therefore directed at addressing physical severances and obstructions: establishing a route connection at Bow Locks, a new crossing over the Lea at Poplar Reach and a means of crossing beneath the A13 motorway flyover near Canning Town.

These early pieces of infrastructure are regarded as catalysts for converting what is currently land used for gas storage, sewage pumping and transport infrastructure into diverse park spaces of the Lea River Park: turning what is an industrial backwater into the foreground of a new public space which people can start to access, use and enjoy.

The Fatwalk will engage with the central concourse of the Olympic Park, ensuring continuity between the two park areas in a continuous but changing environment.

This new connective parkland is called the Fatwalk to emphasise that it is a place in itself rather than just a linkage between points. It should be negotiable by many modes of transport - the unwieldiness of a horse and rider has been used as a rule of thumb.

Figures

Fig 1. A 'seigetower' connection at Twelvetrees Crescent, providing a link between a towpath and a privately-owned bridge.

Fig 2. Mapping of phase one interventions in the valley indicating (in red) points of fracture in ability to access the valley.

Fig 3. The components of the lift and staircase 'seigetower'.
Main truss 'Belvedere' volume, structural steelwork forming a 'phase-shifted' warren truss arrangement.

Free spanning ramp decks mark transition between earth fill ramps and main truss.

Layered metal mesh fencing and walkway lining forming new secure site boundaries, cable bridge enclosure and supporting vertical planting to ramp approaches.

Earth fill and concrete sub strata comprising approach ramps and bridge piers.

Fig 1.

Fig 2.
Fig 1. New River Crossing at Poplar Reach: exploded isometric detailing the various elements that make up the bridge.

Fig 2. General Arrangement - the bridge avoiding high voltage cables and other obstacles.

Fig 3. Elevations of the Fatwalk Connector under the A13 motorway, Canning Town. The Connector slings a route through the structural arches of the central river span of the original Victorian cast iron bridge, and hangs a pair of walkways from the two concrete highway ramps that run either side.

Fig 4. Exploded isometric of the ensemble.
Notes

1. I am most grateful to Dermot Foley for pointing out the connection to Repton, and for his essay The Relationship between Landscape Representation and Landscape Design. Journal of Architecture, Vol 17, No 1 2012.

2. Evident, for example, in David Chipperfield's curatorship of the 2012 Venice Biennale, 'Common Ground'.


5. Robert Venturi's Complexity & Contradiction in Architecture, New York 1966, and Aldo Rossi's writing must be referenced as part of this debate.

6. My thanks to Ellis Woodman for bringing this formative association to my attention.

7. I am grateful to Leon Van Schaik for this observation, which is also referenced in his book Spatial Intelligence, p 74, and for his reference to the work of Grahame Shane illustrated here.

8. Fred Scott was Senior Lecturer at Kingston Polytechnic, which I attended between 1986 and 1990. Kingston was essentially an arts school at this time, and Scott had arrived there from a period at the Architectural Association where he taught with Robin Evans.

9. Vesely and Carl were teaching at the University of Cambridge Department of Architecture, attended from 1991-1993. Vesely was invited to Cambridge by Colin 'Sandy' Wilson in 1978. The combination of an art school and university education was, in retrospect, challenging, but rich.


11. ibid p108.

12. op Cit P113


14. See, for example, Vesely: Architecture & Continuity 1982

15. Vesely, op Cit


19. Ibid.


24. A good example of this lies in the work of Bas Smets: tasked with the creation of a new National Park in Tartu, Estonia on the former Soviet airbase. The Estonians initially attempted to tear out traces of the airstrips but found that the runways, built for Tupolev heavy bombers, are armoured concrete, 5 metres deep. Smets suggested that they transform what's there, learn from local examples of what flora has managed to colonise and take hold.

25. Koolhaas, Rem: see for example *Content* pp458-461.


29. Wittkower R & Saxl: *British Art & the Mediterranean*.


33. Vidler - op cit


Narratives
Bounded Objects, Aggregates & Microcosms

Incipient Urbanity
The extension of an interventionist attitude to the very large scale seems a resilient and adaptive model. I believe that this model has particular relevance to a European topography which faces great flux, as it moves from an explicit industrialised relationship with landscape to a condition which is much more complex and yet mysteriously attenuated in terms of its physical articulation.

The adoption of former industrial structures opens the potential of another order - the inheritance of a space designed to be highly differentiated, where the removal of the original function creates a surplus. As Peter Swinnen notes of 51N4E's C-Mine project:

At C-Mine...an infrastructure that had been severed from its industrial context was used to give structure to new city fabric. Perhaps it’s no longer possible today to build industrial structures of this scale in an urban context. Everything about them seems just too large...The unrefined materials allow users to appropriate the building in a rough way. The dimensions of the interior space are pushed to the limits, as if in anticipation of continually new transformations and conversions. These buildings are made out of ‘surplus space’.¹

This problem has fascinated me in both teaching studios and in practice. I have found the fundamental disconnect between a particular building and its role within a larger intentional landscape, a constant source of both frustration and inspiration.

The relationship between the immediate and the very large scale has been a key theme explored in studio teaching, as well as in practice, in response to Rem Koolhaas’ ‘Fuck Context’: the notion that, at a certain scale, the autonomy of a project creates its own context. As Peter Carl counters:

One may say with Rem Koolhaas ‘fuck context’, but one never actually fucks context in general, only a particular context; and violation / re-interpretation is anyway more revealing than inevitably ersatz imitation. An intervention, like involvement with anyone or with anything is always a particular dialogue...²

At the University of Cambridge Department of Architecture I ran graduate studios based in London, Istanbul, Lowestoft & Yarmouth, and in Hemel Hempstead New Town. The studio looked at the role of architectural creativity in the context of very large-scale planning and the interaction of design with political and economic dynamics. John Tuomey, a visiting critic to the studio, memorably described what we were seeking to accomplish as “thinking big, but in a particular way”.

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¹ Fig 1. Floor plan of 51N4E’s C-Mine - the reworking of a former coalmine in Genk, Belgium to form a cultural centre. I wrote about this project in the Architectural Review, September 2013.

² Fig 2. Drawing by Kieran Perkins from 2004 diploma studio set in Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft, on England’s East Coast.
The Swiss practitioner and external examiner, Professor Marcel Meili, commented:

This studio has been working for several years now, trying to link insights and experiences on a large scale with the actual architectural project. ...all in all, these projects integrate complex mental relationships in a compact manner into the project and in a quite amazing way.

Both teaching and practice pursue an interest in the manipulation of programme as a component of an elaborate narrative strategy for a site, and in particular, the overlayering of different programmes, implied in the model of the social condenser:

Programmatic layering upon vacant terrain to encourage dynamic coexistence of activities and to generate through their interference, unprecedented events.
The use of the term infrastructure appears in our work in a number of ways and requires some definition. Firstly it is encountered quite literally in the ‘contested fields’ in which much of our work takes place. The Lea Valley and city peripheries such as North Cambridge demonstrate the cauterization of what is potentially urban space by the instrumental thinking of engineering. The marginal status of these locations is often maintained by the abundance of active or obsolete infrastructure, and our work involves amelioration, the introduction of the ability of the territory to support multivalent, rather than singular, spatiality.

Although much of our work has been involved in the adaptation and urbanisation of existing infrastructure there is another sense in which the term is encountered in our work: not as literal infrastructure but as a mediation between the large scale and the ‘detail’ of conditions on the ground. Infrastructure in these terms offers a ‘third presence’: a mediating framework between particular architecture and landscape or civic space. As a framework it holds the capacity to orientate without formally determining outcomes.

As defined by Stan Allen, such infrastructures are:

... flexible and anticipatory. They work with time and are open to change. By specifying what must be fixed and what is subject to change, they can be precise and indeterminate at the same time. They work through management and cultivation, changing slowly to adjust to shifting conditions. They do not progress toward a predetermined state (as with master planning strategies), but are always evolving within a loose envelope of constraints... Infrastructure creates a directed field, where different architects and designers can contribute, but it sets technical and instrumental limits to their work. Infrastructure itself works strategically, but it encourages tactical improvisation.\(^5\)

This definition offers a creative annexation of infrastructure from idealised and problem solving towards an anticipatory framework that valorises indeterminacy. Critically, in ceding total control of the environment, one moves from an a priori attitude to design as a purely formal problem towards a process of commitment over time - a role which is necessarily contingent, political and participatory.

**figures**

Fig 1: Alvaro Siza. Service viaduct at Barrio da Malagueira, Evora, Portugal.

Fig 2: Lina Bo Bardi. SESC Pompeia, Sao Paulo, Brazil.
Examples of infrastructure used in this way include Alvaro Siza's thirty-year involvement in the establishment of a new town at Quinta da Malgueira, Evora, Portugal, which Siza characterises as "forming a whole with ruins".

Cedric Price's Potteries Thinkbelt illustrates an attempt to annex redundant physical infrastructure (rail-lines, quarries) as an anticipatory framework for a university - a bridge between a particular landscape and a room.

Lina Bo Bardi's work offers a radically contextual way of operating as a designer and sits in opposition to what one might describe as a tyrannical tendency of architecture towards autonomy and control. Her public work has a deliberately unfinished quality - an awkwardness even - that leaves space for creativity of others.

Bo Bardi regarded her work as an interventional practice - always starting with something, and therefore complex, open and multivalent. At SESC Pompeia, she halts the demolition of a former factory, and uses her skill to instead transform it from a place of work to a setting for leisure and creativity. This translation becomes far more powerful, and more robust, than a building imagined anew. At MASP, her São Paulo museum built over a motorway intersection, she uses the project to establish a mediatory presence between infrastructure and the city, mending the wound created by highway engineering to instate a radically public space.

Bo Bardi's slow, accumulative mode of practice is highly socially engaged, and powerful, placing as it does architecture and design back at the heart of a cultural project. Her ability to absorb the contingent teaches us all about the centrality of everyday life in a useful and politically-engaged architecture.
A Critique of Development Models

Both the public policymaking implied in planning, and the private sector world of development seem complicit in their drift away from engagement with spatial intelligence towards the disciplines of management and accountancy. We have continued to attempt to articulate more precisely this critique of the flattening consequence of this drift on environments, but is certainly a tendency which our practice has evolved to resist through the way we frame, propose and participate in projects.

In the atomised model of the contemporary development industry in the UK, architects deal with buildings, their interiors are fitted out by designers, while the buildings themselves are aggregated into a masterplan developed by an urban designer. The overarching drivers for a project are invariably highly complex financial instruments rather than any coherent spatial idea and the parameters of these instruments are discussed outside the design team and are therefore unavailable as creative tools.

This is not to say that the financial dimensions of a project are unimportant, but to acknowledge that at certain periods, development of cities has had more complex motivations than pure investment.

The financial system itself rests on a generic paradigm. Because finance is risk-averse, it prefers simple, repeatable models which can be compared and valued. While the investment ‘packages’ behind a project might be highly complex, their connection to a spatial problem are remarkably simplistic - based largely on floor area and highly empirical value models.

Development appraisals are built on a neo-liberal conception of the market as a magical self-regulating system in which certain models work and others fail, according to the requirements of the market at any particular time. These models operate on the basis of control. One of the problems with this paradigm is the issue of responsibility: in a project team, the appraisal will be assembled by a land agent or valuer, who might also be responsible for marketing the outcome of the project. If one of the objectives of the project is the creation of value (and one could say that one of the definitions of development is the bestowal of value on land) then one approach might be to speculate about a possible place - the valuer would prefer to leave this responsibility to the market, with the ultimate value being what a purchaser or tenant will pay once the project has been completed. The value of a site is simply what someone will pay for it.

One of the defining characteristics of development over the last decade has been the importance of site assembly and very large-scale land development. In collusion with the financial model, town planning also prefers the certainties of comprehensive development. It stands in for effective planning, it seems to have authority and it also aligns with planning as a managerial activity, with its roots in zoning, and issues of quantum rather than quality.
In a fluctuating economy, investment returns are expected in the short term and that requires that divestment of risk and the control of outcomes. What emerges from the application of this model into spatial reality is large-scale tabula rasa development, composed with generic models that can be valued accurately, with an emphasis on speed. Driven by the need for investor returns and lack of friction, the project manager has emerged as the ‘chef de partie’.

The model is, by nature, not negotiative: by preference, working behind the compound wall, dealing with certainties. In the disciplinary model sponsored by these development phenomena the emphasis is on a specialist task-based contributions, with atomised consultants collaborating through complex managerial frameworks. What becomes difficult in this scenario is invention, contingency, speculation and the incorporation of particular conditions or opportunities: it is a flattened model.

More problematically, it is a model that doesn’t really work very well. The outcomes are familiar: clone towns built on economic monocultures which have proved particularly vulnerable to economic fortune and expensive to finance in the financial downtown. Despite being risk-averse, the models tend to concentrate risk, albeit for short periods, in the hands of a few, gambling that the risk can be divested before crisis occurs. In terms of urban outcomes, this model is demonstrably problematic: a process that hates risk and which privileges control is by definition anti-urban and unlikely to produce good public space.

This sequence developed as a critique of development models through the research and was rehearsed in various forms as the basis for seminars: The Post-Retail Town Centre, Architectural Association, London (May 2013), and: Town centres – Incremental Transformation Design Council CABE, London (July 2013).

I am grateful to Andrew Clancy and Colm Moore for bringing to my attention the painting of The Alchemist by Joseph Wright - a depiction of the discovery of phosphorous through the boiling of urine - and a useful analogy to the magical concept of the market held by many involved in financial and property valuation in the UK.
As the sociologist Saskia Sassen has established, cities are the theatre for an increasingly globalised economy: a key driver behind the rapid urbanisation of the last twenty years. As exchange becomes increasingly virtual and geographically dispersed, the emerging 'city states' require the development of greater differentiation in terms of skill and knowledge in order to gain advantage. The dark reflection of dispersed and virtualised global trade is the establishment of increasingly concrete centres of control.

It is precisely the complex, heterogeneous structure of the city itself that provides a sufficiently variegated environment to support the interdependent ecology of knowledge and services, required by late-capitalist exchange. As the extraordinary complexity of globalised economic structures becomes physically manifest in cities, the great paradox is that the urban environment, while sophisticated in the exchange of knowledge, innovation, finance, law, actually reflect the corporate drivers of this dynamic, with their fetishisation of control, and are dismayingly simplistic in spatial terms. The resultant environments, so familiar to us all from our cities, are generic, flat and risk-averse. Rem Koolhaas' observation of the emerging phenomenon of Bigness - the tendency towards very large scale development - has indeed 'fucked context', yet the resultant environments are increasingly vacuous, deterministic and less able to support the very agonic depth that defines the healthy city.

Since current urbanisation is driven by the need for control, what suffers most are the residual spaces of the city, the spaces which don't play a direct role in the new economy, but which are nevertheless affected by the associated phenomena: gentrification, the polarisation of wealth and the peripheralisation of the poor.

As global cities become more effective and politically compelling economic models than the 19th century idea of the nation state, urban governance itself needs to innovate and change in recognition of these emerging conditions. The last two decades has seen the establishment of the powerful city administration, but the polity has rarely grasped the opportunity of spatial planning as an extension of public policy to counterbalance the corporatisation of cities.

The idea of the public - of civic - space has been eroded for some time, and the role of the state as a commissioner or guardian of public space and public infrastructure is greatly diminished. The great regeneration projects in the last five years in the UK have, I think without exception, produced a privatised public realm with heavily conditional use.

In writing about these new global cities Sassen has identified that infrastructure is a primary issue with which to engage. Increasingly complex and invisible infrastructures are being introduced into cities to enable and maintain their economic status.
Rather than being regarded as civic participatory structures, these infrastructures are invariably privately owned, in contrast with those introduced in the second half of the 20th century. Their introduction is designed by engineers where the generative thinking is systematic and the resulting 'closed loop' deterministic structures are fundamentally at odds with the necessarily heterogenous, indeterminate and messy structure of cities.

If one accepts an alternative model of infrastructure as one of the tropes of civic space - as Peter Carl says, an ‘anonymous representation of collective life’11 - then a broader, more participatory role of infrastructure is necessary.

What follows, in response to these observations concerning the creeping homogeneity of development and the privatisation of infrastructure, is a series of case studies which map out alternative strategies, in particular exploring issues of identity and structure, amplifying attenuated qualities as cultural artefacts and emphasising the particular over the generic.
Case Studies
The following case studies include three completed projects and three competition entries:

**Projects**

Papertrail - a re-purposed post-industrial landscape in a New Town on London's outer fringe.

St Albans - a 'city vision' structure for directing change in a city stuck in its own historical significance

Park Royal - a strategy for locating Europe's largest industrial estate on London's 'mental map'.

**Competitions**

Ovaltown - using planning as a means to resist the 'entropic slide' of the market in an interesting quarter of Hackney, London

Gorizia - the reuniting of a twin city, formerly divided by the iron curtain, between Italy and Slovenia.

Andermatt - the introduction of a new centre and tourist infrastructure for a demilitarised ski resort in Switzerland.
Hemel Hempstead, a satellite twenty miles north of London, was the third post-war New Town, launched in July 1946 as part of the government’s “policy for the decentralisation of persons and industry from London”. The New Town was designed by Geoffrey Jellicoe, a landscape architect, who described his urban vision (which engulfed a much earlier settlement) as “not a city in a garden, but a city in a park.”

Hemel Hempstead lies in the valley of a chalk stream: the Gade, which runs off the Chiltern Hills. The stream feeds the Grand Junction Canal, which connects the Midlands with London. The proximity of London via the canal, together with the motive power of the river - the engine of a series of water mills along its length - made this location a critical one for early industrial development. The Fourdrinier brothers - Huguenot refugees - set up a workshop here in a rented cornmill and effectively invented the process that is still used for industrial paper-making.

The mill and process were bought by the entrepreneur John Dickinson at the outset of the nineteenth century, and became a vast industrial base, employing thousands. The paper that Dickinson produced was the material basis of Britain’s Imperial diktat, and the canal brought both global trade in raw materials right to the heart of this Hertfordshire valley.

5th Studio were invited to develop a strategy for the remnants of this vast operation; by the 1990s the factory had been asset-stripped and closed, with much of the land sold for commuter housing. What remained of the factory were two listed fragments – an operational paper mill at Frogmore, and the mill manager’s house at Apsley, further up the canal among the remains of a much larger papermill.

A charity – the Paper Trail Trust – had been set up to adopt these remaining elements with the intention of creating a visitor attraction around the paper mill, to maintain the remaining historic machinery, to create a research base for experimentation and innovation in papermaking, and an ‘arts cluster’ working on paper, printing and bookmaking.

The factory once covered the Gade Valley, with its enclosures modifying and engulfing the canal into its interior. The typology of watermills generates archipelagos (encountered again in our work in the Lower Lea Valley), with backstreams and sluices, creating a waterscape which is very hard to penetrate. This hydrology extends throughout the production process, where the addition and subtraction of water in highly regulated environmental conditions is critical. The scale and the ambiguous quality of the factory at its height indicated that the project needed to be understood as a problem of landscape.
The resulting masterplan locates itself between built intervention and landscape strategy. We recognised the importance of connecting the project with the town and Geoffrey Jellicoe’s latent ‘city in a park’. The project depended on conservation of the most historic elements of the Mill, while tethering that to the constant dynamic re-invention that the factory embodied. Added to that was the overarching need to break a very large project down into discrete phases that could be realised through different partnerships for various audiences, but brought together as a superimposed, coherent whole, with something of the drama of the original operation.

At Frogmore Mill, the huge Fourdrinier papermaking machine had utility not just as a working historical artefact, but as a rare means of producing short runs of very high quality paper for particular uses. The papermaking process is perhaps the most ruthless example of a production line: each element in the process being strictly sequential. We were fascinated with superimposing the tyranny of a production chain, which aspires to a perfect relationship, with a parallel sequence of spaces which allowed visitors to follow the process without having their arm torn off.

The heart of the Mill is the millrace – simultaneously the most important structure in terms of heritage, and the element which had been the most continuously transformed by adjustment to changes in technology. The race had been adjusted so many times since the original (probably the medieval race of a cornmill) that ironically, this most precious core, in terms of preservation, was also the location that had encountered the most flux.
Fig 1. An early collage plan exploring the linear process of production and entwining that with other parts of the project programme.

Fig 2. The components of the whole project mapped across the two mill sites. The canal has been foreshortened. The canal provided a means of connecting the sites via a wilderness, rather than the banality of town fringe retail parks.

Fig 3. Collage through the mill race at Frogmore Mill - the atmospheric conditions of industrial papermaking brought together with studio papermaking above.

Fig 4. A section of the same set of spaces.

Fig 5. A new quay - we enjoyed the intimacy between built form and the canal and reproduced it with this space to disembark from a riverboat.

Fig 6. Another interface - here an automated room allowed people to drop off their paper for recycling and watch it transformed into pulp for papermaking.
Papermaking is an energy-hungry process, requiring vast quantities of clean water, which are polluted by the production process. The factory’s intimate relationship with the canal allowed it both to draw sufficient water, and to bring into the pulping rooms raw material from barges. Further downstream (for though it is a canal, the Grand Junction is intimately entwined with two rivers at this point, giving it a clear flow towards London) were the remediation beds of the mill. These beds, which were part of a complex hydrological system controlled by the factory, had been abandoned.

We persuaded the Papertrail Trust to add this extraordinary landscape to their project, in partnership with the local council, who had inherited much of the land, and by this means connect the project back along the river to Jellicoe’s water gardens in the heart of the New Town.

The remediation beds – a picturesque example of the decay of human ingenuity to nature – created the perfect landscape for the project to locate its environmental intentions as part of the animation of a public garden built around a dramatic hydrology. The papermills had a long tradition of making paper from waste – both from rags and recycled paper - and the trust set up on the factory’s demise included the establishment of testbeds to develop processes for papermaking that used less energy and water, or that created fewer pollutants.

Our instinct when beginning a project as complex as this is to widen our gaze and to take on more. This tactic surprised our client, who, like many specialist trusts, on inheriting a rich but seemingly insuperable problem, had spent a few years looking with closer and closer focus at the remaining artefacts of the great lost industry. The wider landscape gave us critical clues for how to address the void left by the attenuation of the process – so legible in operation, but so difficult to reconstruct without the industrial activity that formed it. Our role in this project was primarily to construct a new narrative framework to support multiple new ways of using this landscape.

This construction of a narrative was played out against a critique of the New Town itself, and the post-war suburbanisation of the margins.

A series of diagrams were developed to capture the various things that we had learnt about critical aspects of the various sites, and their relationship to the wider landscape. The operation of the Fourdrinier papermaking machine and its hydrology was also mapped.

Fig 1. Both Mills and remediation beds follow the contour of the canal. This drawing relates the key sites of the project, united by the hydrology of the canal and parallel process of papermaking.
Extended from project to studio enquiry in 2006, the introduction brief set out the following task:

The periphery of London is seen by many as simply latent space for the city’s own inexorable expansion. Indeed, the population shift towards the south-east has already resulted in suburbanisation of much of the territory now marked by the M25 – London’s orbital road, completed in 1986.

London has constantly been defined by its periphery - by the sense of what is not London. The landscape that lies without the city has been key to the development of its particular urbanity – beyond the city lies a topography of possibility, of invention, provisioning, play, negotiation, madness.

Among this mundane outer ring are the seed-beds of the future, rapidly being subsumed by the evenness of suburbia ... Amid the end of foxhunting and riots at IKEA, the studio have been encouraged to question ‘what is this territory for?’ and to develop ideas of new or latent topographies to develop a critique of this rather jaded and unfinished New Town.

Fig 1.
Strategies of differentiation can be seen in two projects that find quite different territories in the north-western periphery of London, through documentation of what is already there.

St Albans is a cathedral city with a substantial Roman foundation, now a wealthy commuter satellite just beyond London’s orbital road. Park Royal – known as ‘London’s Workshop’ – is a critical ‘just in time’ service area for central London, and Europe’s largest industrial estate, positioned just a few miles west of the centre of London.

These two places would seem to have very different issues: the former one of the UK’s most prosperous towns, the latter a critical city servicing resource, regarded as having something of a lawless environment.

In St Albans we were appointed by the town council to develop a thirty-year ‘vision’ for the city, where conservation and heritage protection had led to a negative, reactive planning culture. Since the 1970s, the city’s development has been compromised through poor planning, which sought to prevent physical change. Lacking a sense of a contemporary identity and a prospective idea of a how to guide inevitable flux, the city has had development imposed through the planning appeal system. The town council had realised this when their planning team turned down the council’s own proposals to modify the town hall.
In a similar way, Park Royal can be said to have lost a sense of place. Park Royal is an area of 700 hectares which constitutes Europe’s largest industrial estate. Located halfway between Heathrow and Central London, it plays a key role in the city’s strategic service and employment system. But Park Royal is a victim of its own success as ‘London’s Workshop’ – with a congested road network and a low quality public realm presenting challenges to its thriving economy.

Although vast, there is almost no public space, and the generic quality of the roads and residual spaces between anonymous big sheds and workshops has created a dangerous ‘white van’ road culture. This hard environment has made it difficult for firms to attract and keep employees, and numerous road accidents had only reinforced the sense of placelessness. Workers tend to drive to work, even though many live relatively locally. A better set of routes and spaces would enable walking or cycling from the residential neighbourhoods that surround the quarter.

Given the impossibility of comprehensive change on this vast scale, the proposals offer a tactical response which considers how to maximize the impact of investment: a strategy of targeted intervention. The strategy articulates a clear spatial reading of Park Royal as a place – understanding it as a distinct city quarter defined by a perimeter wall of transport infrastructure – in order to guide the geographical logic of proposals.

Working with a ‘toolkit’ of tactics – from big-scale moves to bottom-up local projects – it proposes a spectrum of projects within three spheres of action: network, gateways and districts.
Fig 2.

Fig 3.
Fig 1. Overall strategy - assembling the different layers of the proposals.

Fig 2. Gateways are the points of entry to Park Royal, coincident with rail and underground stations, where it is possible to cross the infrastructure that establishes it as a distinct territory. The proposed interventions seek to strengthen the identity of Park Royal and the sense of its boundary by reinforcing the unique qualities of these edge spaces.

Fig 3. The ‘network’ describes a series of road corridors that are almost the only way to traverse Park Royal. The strategy proposes to improve their functional operation, safety and spatial quality through the integration of a system of off-road cycle paths and a consistent materiality – as well as seeking to maximise use of the Grand Union Canal.

Fig 4. A series of distinct pieces of urban fabric whose diversity is critical to the economic operation and urban character of Park Royal. To support this richness of place, and fit with the reality of what would make sense on the ground, the strategy proposes a number of small-scale interventions which respond to specific local conditions.
OVALTOWN

‘zone of tolerance’

The English Planning tradition is bureaucratic, mid-spatial, controlling use, rather than directing spatial opportunity. This concern with separating use prevents the creation of a ‘rich mix’.

What could ‘tolerance’ provide in Ovaltown?

Ovaltown is a hole between major East London agents of change: Olympic Park, the Hackney / Shoreditch / Clerkenwell / Islington. Yet it does have the ‘urban assets’ needed by any self respecting town: park, canal, urban mobility. It is located between busy London high streets, the quiet canal and the ancient route of the ‘High Path’, which connects a string of market towns.

Ovaltown is fascinating precisely because it is a significant area of town which remains available to plan. In contrast to the stuff around it, land ownership is in relatively few hands.

With the glasnost now decommisined, the void now presents the area from an endogonic slide: porous, the particularity that makes its interesting place. Unheded, coached forces will generate a housing monoculture with the local ownership stemming into a thousand individual mortgage securities.

All property conditions in a city, private accommodation is the least available for change before the combination of ownership, long-term investment, and value for development into urban sands reaches this condition, a certain estate is inevitable.

We ask: "what alternative urban landscape might result from the latest creation of housing monocultures, and do retain the capacity for change / variety of use over time?" What land ownership pattern might present as alternative to the entropic fragmentation of many tiny estate or student rooms?"

Ovaltown might develop some resistance to the three magnets of its neighbouring communities.

URBAN SPLASH

Re-use of the existing infrastructure of the Park Hill estate, Sheffield, which is of a similar scale to the Ovaltown site.

...an idea that operates at a singular level between infrastructure and architecture.

We propose to bring the regiment to Ovaltown, providing stables in the underscreen...

...on top of which, at viaduct / station level, is built a curtain enclosure about 650 places to live.

Ministry of Defence

The failure of the planning authorities to retain a 'vital site' in Knightsbridge has resulted in an anchor tenant becoming available - the Household Cavalry are to be evicted from Hyde Park Barracks.

The Oval - Ovaltown's Albert Square

- glasnost glasnost park - using low grade heat from the...
- waste to energy plant that takes the surrounding city's waste and puts it back in power and heat.
- The Household Cavalry barracks, stables and parade ground relocated from Hyde Park
- The Barracks

Ovaltown, equidistant between the Regiment's ceremonial parade and the equestrian landscape of the Lee Valley, including our Patruck project.

Planned development for the site is already high density.

Adelphi - housing above a plinth of industry.

Knightsbridge

We are interested in the 'eu general' planning principles of the evolution or previous - for example, a university to develop a range of accommodation from cultural spaces, business hospitals, nuclear laboratories and student housing within its boundaries.

Tower of Babel - the love child of the glasnost and railway nostalgia.
...a working undercroft - a place to maintain and grow the working community already on the site...

...where the Regiment's traditional craft skills compliment a local Hackney economy amongst the undercroft.

The opportunity to create environmentally complex spaces: excess heat from waste to power plant, fed by Hackney's household waste, creates tropical conditions in the Gasholder Gardens.

Life around the new canal cut - the lower working wards, upper landscapes and enclosed wall with lower.

In terms of 'tolerance' the point of planning is to create something different from existing forms: something of itself.

View from a duplex flat in the East Tower: the urban gardens of Oval, the Gas Garden & the Han. Thought of as a sort of 'greening' of objects: increased autonomy, and yet an increased role for the rest of the city.

5th studio in collaboration with urbandesign
Gorizia lies at the heart of the upper Adriatic, between the regions of Friuli Venezia Giulia and Zahodna Slovenija. The town is set in a rich landscape, between the Julian Alps to the north and the Adriatic coast to the south.

The Schengen agreement has brought down the ‘Iron Curtain’ border between Italy and Slovenia. The formerly divided city of Gorica / Gorizia is at the centre of a potential ‘knowledge corridor’ linking Udine, Gorizia, Trieste, Koper and Ljubljana. This corridor is like a golden thread through a very particular and productive landscape. Our proposals for the competition Il spazio giovani alla frontiera grows from this geographical and economic reality.

A DIVIDED CITY
For over a millennia Gorizia has had a defensive character. It is border country ...
IRON CURTAIN
... from medieval castellations which exploit the terrain, to the Iron Curtain which once divided Italy and the former Yugoslavia.

BORDER
As is characteristic of a border zone, the adjacent territory has become a ‘terrain vague’ fuori le mura; a place for singular institutions within defined enclosures. Natural features have been coerced into a systematised landscape.

DEMILITARISATION
With European integration a relaxed border offers the opportunity for vibrant renewal of this middle ground. A Space for Hospitality can be created, in place of the inhospitable systems of division; a rich mix of activity where there was rigid singularity.

CATALYST
what is the catalyst for this re-occupation of the valley? We propose that regional investment in infrastructure is used to create a point of intensity: a new centre in what has been a peripheral zone...
...creating a rationalised rail system and a central station for the twin cities. The new station will provide direct train services between the university and research nodes across the region. A ‘treno natura’ will connect the mountains with the coastal resorts.

A series of overlaid topographies stitch together the old borderline and make spaces for play, sport and hospitality.

A former hospital estate is re-occupied and thrown open for culture and creative enterprise. All the riches of the upper Adriatic region are represented here for the use of young citizens.

The masterplan identifies a latent university, research and enterprise quarter.
Rather than demolish the great institutional buildings of the former Sanatorium and hospital (Croce di Lorena) we have proposed treating these in different ways to help structure this new urban quarter.

The opportunity of the existing slack areas and generous infrastructure left following the disassembly of the border is utilised as the basis for a newly intensified urban quarter. This is focussed on research and accommodation - around the Piazzale della Casa Rossa and linking across the border as an urban continuum.

The proposed station is at the centre of a great new urban space between the two towns, and is the beginning of an intensive area of development.

The site also realises a major park space and the existing web of footpaths and cycleways are enhanced and expanded, encouraging non-car use.
Ein Scloss für Andermatt

Andermatt is a Swiss resort which has experienced dramatically changing fortunes. As the last stop before the St. Gotthard pass, the village flourished economically and became a popular spa. Andermatt also became the garrison town and command centre of the Swiss Federal Army.

By the 1930s, the town’s income from tourism had seriously declined, and by 1990 the grand hotels had been abandoned and were eventually demolished with explosives.

With the departure of the Federal Army, Andermatt is undergoing much speculative building. Egyptian billionaire Samih Sawiris intends to invest $500m on doubling the size of the resort and on improving its ski infrastructure. We took part in a competition in 2011 to establish a new urban centre for the resort.

The competition text read:

Each period of Andermatt’s development is distinctive – the original village around the pass road, the chalets of the post war period, to the highly differentiated object-ground of the contemporary podium development.

What is missing from this picture? With the demilitarisation of the village, what should be created as the middle ground between the existing and proposed quarters of Andermatt?

We imagine the new intervention as a singularity – a generous volume that operates as a hospitable gathering space for the village. We see the opportunity for a hybridisation of architecture, landscape and infrastructure: in short we propose A CASTLE FOR ANDERMATT.

Taking inspiration from structures such as Le Mont St Michel and Hadrian’s Mausoleum, the proposition superimposes a number of different topographies to create a public space at the heart of the village:

- An extensive botanic garden and arboretum as a microcosm of Swiss landscape, creating river and lake topographies, high alpine gardens, alpine meadow, forests and erratic fields. The entire site is treated as a landscape.
- A transport interchange for effective arrival, departure and movement within Andermatt
- 4 season visitor infrastructure, enabling visitors to access the surrounding landscape on foot, horse, cycle and ski
- Local services, education and living accommodation to support the village economy and to ensure that local skills are enhanced, including a brewery.

Landscape Ecologies

The landscape presents a didactic microcosm of Swiss ecologies, from High Alpine rock gardens through to mixed forest and native prairie topographies. These topographies are also keyed to water systems and orientation – which has a great effect in the extreme climate, sheltering from winds and offering access to sun or shade.

Figures

Fig 1. View of the new centre of Andermatt from the Gurschen lift.

Fig 2. Sections through the proposal

Fig 3. Sketchbook investigation, overlaying landscape microcosm, transport systems (rail, ski lifts, busses) and a mixed programme, from tourism to local economy.

Fig 4. The various elements of the proposal - both landscape ecologies and programme.

Fig 5. The new urban centre in its valley setting.
Fig 2.

Fig 3.

Fig 4.

Fig 5.
Notes

7. Koolhaas, Op cit
8. This erosion has been well documented and discussed as a phenomenon by sociologists such as David Harvey, Richard Sennett and Ed Soja
9. See Anna Minton's book Ground Control for a discussion of this tendency.
10. Sassen, Op cit
interview
As the focus of the research shifts from a retrospective understanding of 5th Studio's approach, and the explication of some of the roots and enchainments of that body of work, an interview with architectural critic Ellis Woodman serves to validate a prospective set of projects which have been shaped and reinforced by the research.

Ellis Woodman is the architecture critic of the Daily Telegraph newspaper and Executive Editor of Building Design. He studied architecture at the universities of Cambridge and North London, and worked as an architect for seven years before becoming a full time architecture critic in 2003.


The interview took place between Ellis Woodman and Tom Holbrook at the 'Boot & Flogger' in Southwark, London on 12 March 2013. The interview has been edited and annotated by Tom Holbrook.

This interview serves to validate the positions being foregrounded, with an emerging sense of how a greater understanding of the work has informed a more precise authorship via three live exegetic projects.
T: ‘The research has split into these three prospective projects, taking a more direct path out of the thesis’

E – ‘so the North Sea work is part of that?’

T: ‘Yes, there is a singular topography between Lincolnshire and Schleswig-Holstein, which you notice from the window of the Eurostar: similar conditions whenever you look up. Various kinds of logistic worlds are really determining these landscapes: the serial airport schemes for London for example. These are enormous projects which remain undiscussed in terms of the environments they create. The book we made frames the dialogue, essentially addressing this cultural gap.

I’m interested in exploring these found conditions, in making observations on the upheaval that’s going on from the North Sea back to the first major motorway inland, with the aim of bring that into a spatial discourse with some connection to the discipline. We’re interested in seeing how these monocultural conditions might become ameliorated, richer. We have been talking of the project as a contemporary ‘Rural Rides’ going through this trans-national topography, looking very carefully at the similarities, and the differences.

E – ‘That Patrick Keiller film Robinson in Space seems to be all about that – putting a lie to the idea that Britain is no longer a manufacturing nation. There’s also a Rayner Banham essay – Flatscape with Containers, written at the time as Cedric Price’s Thinkbelt project, which is also one of the references.

T– ‘It’s really interesting how that generation were so tied into ideas about landscape’

E – ‘Yes, one thinks of the Architectural Review’s ideas on re-visiting the picturesque: Eric de Maré’s photographs for example...’

T– ‘...There’s that and there’s Colin Rowe’s connection with Wittkower. Anthony Vidler talks about a strong strand of thinking that Stirling is introduced to through Rowe: all about burial mounds and castles. He references the Saxl & Wittkower exhibition, British Art and the Mediterranean which came out of the Warburg Institute.'
E – ‘They did a lot of going away at the weekend: Gowan photographing Restormel and Dover Castles. And there was the NW1 Group that met and discussed slides of landscapes and so on in Gospel Oak. That group included people like Paolozzi.

So you’re working towards what on the Phd? ...we’ve talked about one of the 3 projects, what about the other two?

T – ‘Of the other two, the intermediate project takes North Cambridge as one of the last bits of that city to be urbanised, and the third project is a kind of re-fitting of a car park in the middle of the city.

North Cambridge is interesting as it has a rare bit of infrastructure investment by government, in the form of a new rail station, but the station lands at the moment in this nothingness of the city’s sewage works, and extensive car parking around the Science Park. We think it’s an opportunity to review the Science Park model, which is 50 years old, and to retrofit it - to start using the station and these various other elements as ‘agents of change’

E – ‘Right’

T – ‘There’s an interesting hybrid that comes out of creating a landscape that can deal with extensive remediation of water management, using that and the arrival of the station to help form something very urban. And then there’s the potential to re-think the spaces for science and technology - entrepreneurial culture - that isn’t like Palo Alto.

It’s really fascinating territory and nobody’s thinking about it. The land is in really few ownerships. So it’s really possibly to talk about an orientating plan. Because it’s to the east of the city there’s lots of city utilities - the national grid, and this great sewage works for example - which cauterizes the site. The Water company have to spend millions on the sewage works to bring it up to standard: it’s Victorian infrastructure. It’s a huge site and it’s got this shockingly low density: almost none of its built on. Twelve percent of it is blacktop: car parking and road. It has this suburban quality to it.
At a global scale, the urbanisation of this hi-tech world is going apace. The Science Park is trying to attract a global audience of bright graduates and the only social infrastructure it has is a sandwich van in the car park, and that just doesn't work anymore. And of course the ‘cluster’ phenomenon depends on people meeting – but here there's no stuff in between to support this.

E - ‘And do you see this project as a model or a case study that might reflect something back to the bigger territorial study?’

T - ‘I think this project is about differentiation: you make one part more urban, and the other more extensive. You build an edge to something that’s thought of as city, rather than as an intermediate world. And then finding these quasi-infrastructural moments where the sewage works is made into a piece of landscape that does various things: that supports development, generates power and so on. Trying to use the infrastructure as a catalyst that is also the beginnings of an urban model.’

E - ‘And the third, lower scale project is what?’

T - ‘The third project is a kind of re-fitting of a car park in the middle of Cambridge: a car park which came out of a plan for the city from 1966, where car parks are seen as these civilising interchanges between the private motorist, to the point where they emerge into the city and become citizens.

So there’s this 60s car park which needs lots of money because it's all falling to bits through concrete cancer. It was built on the edge, and now it's in the middle of the city: land values have exploded. It forms one edge to Parker’s Piece - it’s an impressively scaled building - a piece of scenography’

E - ‘And is it a live project?’

T - ‘It's building into a live project. We've got a bit of it as a live project, we hope, and we're trying to extend that into the bit that the City Council owns. They have this quandary about having to spend millions repairing this car park which they rather get rid of, which is completely blind to Parker’s Piece.’

E - ‘And do they still need the car park?’

T - ‘No, they probably need a proportion of it, but because of land values we could put that underground. What we've said is that it should be a ‘city building’, rather than it being a car park with a gymnasium. It should be lots of things, that builds into this terrace that has sufficient scale to address Parkers Piece. Part of that is mapping how Parker's Piece was on the edge of the city - where the town gaol was, and then it became one of the first pockets to be enclosed out of the Great Eastern field.

Over time if you keep looking at it, the position on a map where the Ordnance Survey writes ‘Cambridge’ gradually creeps over it, so if you Google ‘Cambridge’ now it drops a pin right on Parker's Piece: it’s become the middle, while it once was on the edge. There’s a whole rash of civic development from the 70s - the Police Station, the Fire Station, the car park - that’s now being knocked down and re-made as something much more valuable in economic terms. So it’s a continuation of that narrative.

E - ‘It feels like one of the things that connects the three projects is roads and car infrastructures: from the scale of a car park to the blacktop terrain of the Science Park, to the motorways of the big territorial scheme. The question of how you make functional urban value of that landscape.’

T - ‘Yes. And it’s really fascinating looking at some of those Smithsons’ engagements with roads, which were bonkers....’

E - ‘As in ‘AS in DS’. They did a Cambridge scheme didn't they?’

T - ‘They did a Cambridge scheme, yes. They were really interested in roads. Look at the New Ways for London: Peter Smithson lays down this huge number which goes right through Soho, taking out everything we hold dear...’
E - ‘...that's the National Theatre there...and Centrepoint?’

T - ‘Yes. Peter Smithson says: ‘Seen from the year 2002, the net of roads is too tight, too destructive’\(^9\). Ha ha! It was interesting because they thought roads were what architects should be talking about, and they talk about road infrastructure as being like a river, or the Acropolis: having this topographic status as something you could build meaning around. Other people like Louis Kahn were also looking at these interchange points - the Philadelphia work - where car parking has got this status: terminals, the extensity of moving around, and there's the point of urbanity where you change that, somehow. Like a great rail station does for 19th century infrastructure.’

E - ‘That’s interesting, no one's ever done a car park that’s contained that sort of urban presence - Preston Bus Garage\(^11\) perhaps’

T - ‘Well exactly, these are incredible structures. There's this great article in the Architectural Review from 1960 by Michael Brawne on ‘parking terminals’\(^12\), with key examples of a new typology, and bits of Neufert-type metrics - how various systems of slotting cars in work - and yet there's also this incredible feeling of it as a new public typology: like a city gateway or something like that.’

E - ‘Brian Richards was a member of Team X who was a road expert and he collaborated with James Gowan and the Smithsons, and taught at the AA, but I've never read anything about him. But he was the one who really knew about that stuff in Team X. That's fascinating, how you could make something on an urban scale out of traffic...’

T - ‘Well it’s an interesting scale ‘in between’. As with the North Sea conversation, there's a world that architects don't really occupy: that's located somewhere between the urban and the infrastructural. A condition that's at the edge, with an interest in differentiation: between one side and the other of an urban condition.'
E - ‘Is OMA’s Zebrugge Terminal an example of that?’

T - ‘Yes exactly, and I think that Kollhoff’s Atlanpole project has that kind of interesting connection to something that feels like a piece of infrastructure, and yet has an urban density, an obvious public presence. An institutional presence I suppose.’

E - ‘Kollhoff has this thing he takes from O M Ungers, this idea of grossform. Both Kollhoff and Rem Koolhaas were both students at Cornell with Ungers. Kollhoff developed this idea for archipelago urbanism where he stopped believing that a city can be reconstructed (which was his position until the reconstruction of Berlin became available!). Things like Piraeus were a manifestation of this idea: that something is massive and a singular form, off regular scale, and speaking for an archipelago object in that dimension.’

T - ‘And I guess trying to make sense of that problem of how we bring meaning to those post-industrial scales of space - whether that’s the Amsterdam dockside, or like at 51N4E’s C-Mine project.’

E - ‘Your St Neots project has something of that...it feels like it has an aspiration to suggest a different scale, a more urban idea than what’s around it’

T - ‘Yes definitely. There’s that weary feel in any of those towns that we tend to work in, that all are becoming dormitory towns, too close to London. Their market - in the case of St Neots - its role as a market town which was safely far enough away that it could develop a manufacturing industry or have some connection with agriculture and actually its now all about housing. Housing is the only game in town.

E - ‘A dormitory operation...’

T - ‘...the government growth agenda or economic agenda just produces reams of little housing boxes, to send people to London. That project came from a brief where the council were trying to cement a home-grown economic culture in the town, so that kids didn’t grow up and automatically leave. Instead they might find a cheap place to set up a company, and do something locally. And we felt it was really key that it was a reminder, but also a prospective idea, about how it wasn’t just a dormitory town, but was something more urban. In reality its getting more and more...’
suburban. So a sort of awkward building, that is compact, and talks about a different sort of economy, was the intention.’

E - ‘I’m just thinking about your territorial scale investigation, where presumably these different sites that you’re identifying between the North Sea and the motorway: their employee base is primarily within a 10 mile radius, so the way they are magnets for people living locally, whereas there’s this other story, which is probably much more dominant, about commuting suburban centres. There must be a graphic where you can overlay those two points of attraction – the big one from London and the local one?’

T - ‘That’s really interesting - because there is this sort of placelessness to the locations that are growing up as places to work or industrial settings. That’s something we came across at Park Royal, in the Lea Valley, and in Cambridge - because they’re on the edge of something: they’re devalued and they’re seen as problematic landscapes that people don’t want to walk through. The perception of them is as low value places, when they’re actually not: they’re of critical importance, and are quite well used, but there’s something in the association of places to do with making that isn’t valued. That may be a residue of planning and zoning or something like that; these places should never be as monofunctional as they are. Yet almost, even if they live quite close to them, people tend to drive, because there’s some sort of disconnect, a proximity issue.

Take something like DP World17, which is the proposed new port out in the Thames It will employ about 12,000 people, but they will all drive in, work and then go away. Compare that to the Port of London where there’s a completely different idea of those proximities: you don’t get an enduring culture out of that, you just get the efficiencies of forklift operations or Fordist planning of a process, with no residue or grit.’

E - ‘But there’s almost two landscapes overlaying, there’s this commuting landscape: people who aren’t actually invested in the place, beyond their garden or the shopping centre. And then in terms of your desire to make these compounds less monofunctional, there aren’t too many ingredients available: empty landscapes. It’d be interesting to see how one connects those worlds more directly, the commuter world and the more localised world.

Do you have any places which you do think are models, that are achieving something more purposeful in relation to the landscape, and are more socially integrated?’

T - ‘I suppose that I’m interested in stuff that has come together over a longer period of time, so bits of Cambridge, Mass. or funny edge situations, that have had such extreme conditions that they’ve ameliorated those over time, and become more successful urban spaces. Ameliorating things inherited from engineers for example, like the Victoria Embankment: an incredible, brilliant project, in engineering terms, but with horrific implications for anything urbane, compared to what was there, and the vibrancy of that river edge.’

E - ‘But I guess I meant in the more perforate landscape that you’re looking at, are there solutions - are there better out-of-town shopping centres or militarised zones, or ...’

T - ‘I think it’s such an unremarked phenomenon that actually it hasn’t got that awareness: amelioration hasn’t really kicked in yet. But there’s definitely work that needs doing. I think it’s interesting that there’s a whole generation of architects dealing with these things, but I guess it hasn’t been explicit in its conceptualisation yet as a landscape problem. It tends to be on the basis of individual projects, so something like C-Mine, or a whole number of projects which one can think of that essentially stem from this issue, and end up tackling it through a model of a back extension, or a new industrial building, or a single project. The issue is that not many people are taking about a larger crisis, so those things aren’t a located in some sustained bit of thinking. I think a lot of Bas Smet’s work17 is looking at those conditions because they’re so prevalent in Belgium.’
E - 'So it's the existing condition, and how you transform it is what you're particularly interested in, rather than the developing the new model: how you cultivate a more urban condition in places with a lack'

T - 'I suppose the north Cambridge stuff is looking at something where, without planning in a spatial rather than bureaucratic sense, it will just end up in a series of incremental projects, and will miss the opportunity to re-think that edge of the city as something that's more 'thick', more multivalent.'

E - 'Do you think something like Paju Book City\(^8\) is a model?'

T - 'Yes possibly, Certainly Florian Beigel has been talking about this condition for a long time. The idea of a masterplan that doesn't overdetermine: what's his phrase? – ‘design the rug, but not the picnic’ - a kind of orientation towards something where you lay down certain conditions and realise that you can't control everything. That's really fascinating in terms of thinking about what one's role is as a masterplanner: whether it's a formal idea, which is Richard Rogers' generation's approach, which fast becomes almost completely obsolete, because it doesn't adapt very well to events. Or something that's more sequential or able to deal with contingent stabilities, but which still is clear about what the essential ingredients of what one's trying to achieve.'

E - 'And it feels when you talk about masterplanning, your interest is always about edge conditions, about encounters between things with different functions or different scales, and with the Rogers' plan one's looking at something formally fixed. There's a difference in sensibility - you're relaxed about what the disposition, the dimensions of what the various elements might be, but you're interested in the relationship between one thing and something surprising adjacent to it.'

T - 'I think that's right, and I've realised through the process of doing the PhD that there are flaws in that approach - that our attitude to masterplanning is very sequential and it depends on an idea that things never happen at once, or even in an ideal way at all, so is pessimistic about the level of control you can operate with.'
I think that's quite a good thing. But, there's also, countering that, this interest in the very large scale and the singular object, something like looking at Kollhoff: those things so rarely come off, because they're based on a 'Napoleon' turning up, or an idea of planning which is a bit like the Smithsons' imposition of a motorway system through Soho - really interesting things come out of that. But it's kind of catastrophic at the same time. And at a time when planning is at a low ebb: a nadir, and laissez faire planning is really where it's at.

This developer I was talking to today said you might have a great plan: 'I like the plan, I can see what you're talking about in North Cambridge, absolutely get it, but of course, when the customer comes along and says they want a 20,000 square foot floorplate, that's what the customer gets'. And I guess I find that really problematic at one level, but on the other hand, some of the stuff I admire has come out of a meeting point or, as with the analogy of the rug & the picnic, a control or a clear statement on the one hand of what's important, and an awareness that you can't control it - that it's not all going to be as you imagined it a priori. But I guess to have that conversation you have to have a level of sophistication, and a cultural level of engagement in what you're trying to achieve, that isn't available here at the moment.

E - 'Your impulse is always towards making sensitive juxtapositions between slightly nebulous, defined quantities; in America an urban planning strategy might be a grid plan. And maybe that's a more robust way of making order out of the ebbs and flows of late capitalist society.'

T - 'That's true. Although you could look at Cerda's Barcelona plan, which is somewhere in between: it is a grid plan, but you've also got chamfered corners where other things can happen. There's a sort of built-in uncertainty principal in that planning which is really interesting.'

E - 'And it's interesting that you're looking at the Smithsons - there's probably a gap between them and you - they're the last British architects who were interested in planning before a generation who weren't. I don't know if they were very effective in their engagement with planning, but it was certainly on their agenda.'

T - 'Yes, and at a time when planning was a really strong and powerful, politically supported, arm of policy - an extension of policy. Whereas the stuff we've done with Design for London has felt like guerrilla tactics: despite politicians and policy, we've managed to do something good. I think that's really problematic.

Design for London, and the Architecture and Urbanism Unit before, were incredibly good clients, who brought urbanism back into architecture: bringing the idea that you can design a city, and architects had a place at that planning discussion. But the bit that didn't really work was convincing the politicians that this was a powerful model. That ultimately that didn't seem to get through. Curiously Richard Rogers got it, quite a lot of planners got it but I'm not sure Livingstone did, I'm not sure Johnson does.'

E - 'And do you feel as an architect / planner you bring a different sensibility from someone who has come from a purely planning background? Although I suppose that doesn't really exist anymore, the creative planner. Its a hard one to ask'

T - 'Well for instance, the Smithsons did plans for Cambridge and the planning at that time was incredibly powerful and top-down: people like Holford were involved, in the days when planners got knighthoods, and there was a top-down expectation that the state would guide. Looking back, those plans did understand what the issues were facing the city: mostly to do with cars, private motoring, the challenges of that, and the introduction of shopping. And they kind of got it pretty much right: but their implementation was never really tested on the ground, so the reality of it was very crude: raised highways, or the Smithson's imposed motorway phenomena was never really imagined spatially. And yet the counterpoint of that now is that everything is about ameliorating local conditions. There's no sense of the town as a whole, what you might do strategically...'

E - 'I think one of the things you've clearly identified as an area of interest is the motor car and its implications which is absolutely the engagement which discredited a generation of planners 30 years ago. Almost to the point where its become dubious to be thinking on that sort of scale: the planning we associate with Design for London it is at a much more micro scale, and I haven't heard anyone talk about what the nature
of southeast England, from London to Lowestoft, should be. If that feels like as a spatial problem, it's one that's not been addressed for many decades. Do you feel you're consciously revisiting a problem which has got a history?'

T - 'I think for us those phenomena have become a marker, a laboratory marker, a cancer test for places that we become interested in. So if there's been a big piece of infrastructure from the Embankment, through to bits of regeneration like the Eastport scheme in Great Yarmouth, or High Speed 2, or any of the sort of redemptive infrastructure, that we're now talking about, then we're interested. I think what was interesting in the 60s was the redemptive quality of thinking about roads and infrastructure, as something that had a civilising possibility, and that would come with new typologies that would be civilising: something in which architects would find the new challenges, like great rail stations. And I guess we're interested that there is still scar tissue, maybe 100 years later at, say Kings Cross or St Pancras, or on the Embankment where the infrastructure is only just being re-assimilated into the city.

I suppose looking at where engineering projects have gone before. Down the Lea Valley there's lots of this stuff that's been dreamt up by engineers: bits of the London motorway box, the Eastway and all that stuff, are hugely problematic because they're not urban, and - like the magnet the wrong way around - it repels urbanism. And it takes a long time to address. The north Cambridge project is all about looking at railway sidings and sewage works, and pretty aggressive road engineering that's also expected to be the heart of England's creative industries, and those two things just don't work, they're repellent to each other.

So how do you take these things on? You've got to know something about roads. And I suppose in many ways the agenda which that generation set in the 60s: of shopping, and roads, is still with us: The shopping thing is now about the decay of high streets, the road thing is about trying to re-think some of those problems of discouraging private motoring - having paid off its Utopia expectations. We suddenly got really excited that there
are certain buildings which are going out of fashion: becoming markers for new interventions: so whether that’s petrol stations, or gasometers, or multistorey car parks built in the 60s. Each one of those becomes a future project, becomes a typology for revisiting and translating into something that’s no longer just doing one technical thing.'

E - ‘I’m intrigued, looking at the Louis Kahn project, what’s interesting there is this change that happens between an infrastructural scale and an architectural scale. There’s a point at which he takes the infrastructural network and brings it into an architectural conclusion. And you could definitely think of projects where that line is much more blurred: the characteristic 1960s car park is that. One’s resistant to think of most car parks as architecture because they feel like a vertical extrusion of road. And I wonder how as an architect / planner one is thinking at both scales - how you see that interface? How does the journey from the motorway to where someone is standing on a pavement - how is that termination ideally modulated?’

T - ‘I suppose - like looking at those Kahn drawings - that it feels very much thought of as a problem of landscape. So, much like Stirling and Gowan looking at castles and landforms as a way to form Churchill as an autonomous object on the edge of Cambridge, that tries to express what the college needs in terms of connections and autonomy. There was a sensibility at that time, it seems to me, that was about something scenographic: about landscape. They were looking for models, de-militarised models - like castles - which are huge in East Anglia, and finding a new architecture that came out of that funny hybrid between those two things. That’s really interesting because some of those car parks have that quality. I mean quite a lot of that brutalist generation of architecture like the South Bank and Preston Bus Garage, also have that unfinished quality that’s really ready to go back and re-visit, finish. That’s really fascinating, because instead they are often torn down. I mean, Robin Hood Gardens is being torn down just before its quality is finally realised! Perhaps it does take 50 years to realise something that started off as landscape, and finishes as a proper building: the same with the Hayward Gallery.

The discussion behind the Preston Bus Garage is fascinating because there’s this structure, which is pretty much the only thing that Preston has that has that openness and sense of possibility. And that’s really exiting - we don’t think or build like that anymore, but the scenographic scale I think is quite deep in the English psyche – the sort of thing Vanbrugh was talking about: a way of building big and worrying about how it’s occupied later - it becomes filled with stuff. But it has an idea of duration - so you build this thing and gradually it becomes absorbed and useful.’

E - ‘That feels like your interest in the Adelphi. About building at an infrastructural scale which can be occupied in many different ways.’

T - ‘All that Thames edge held a sequence of projects that had that quality of being like open code, it had a fuzziness at a certain level, but at other levels was incredibly refined. So at the Adelphi you got some of the best plaster workers in Europe finishing the rooms, and those rooms were finished, but it stands on a podium of stuff that’s completely unfinished, and has the Thames washing in at the bottom. I suppose that spectrum of ‘completeness’ to ‘availability to be occupied in different ways’ or to be more contingent I find really fascinating. And there’s not just the Adelphi, but Hungerford Market, and various other bits, such as the Savoy: it seems like that bit of the Thames at the time was a piece of a infrastructure like our motorways. At that time it attracted this weird intermediate scale of thinking: like a laboratory for London urbanism.’

E - ‘I think I asked this question when we were in Ghent, but often your interests come back to these big infrastructural-scale projects, that have a certain scale, a certain ruthlessness. The largest building I’ve seen of yours is the St Neots one, which is the most monumental in a way...but it’s not a monumental language...it’s more like...’

T - ‘...assemblage?’

E - ‘Yes absolutely. And I guess I wonder if... at what point does the language of a building a kilometre long become different from the language of a house? how do you negotiate those transitions of scale? How do you find an appropriate scale for the language you’re working in?’
T - ‘I think that’s a really interesting issue. The first time I presented in Ghent it was one that John Tuomey picked up. He asked something like: ‘if the things you love are so singular, why is your architecture made of bits... why is it assemblage?’ I’ve been really struggling with that question, because its certainly true that some of the stuff that I most admire in terms of urbanism comes out of the Adams’ idea, the idea of the terrace say. To get down to the scale of a house, the terrace is the perfect model of a repetitive and yet fairly contingent structure where you can change stuff all the time: it can be a posh house, or it can be 5 tenements depending on fortune. And yet the projects we’ve done tends to be made out of bits. I guess the intention at St Neots was to make a singular building, and there are certain singular bits of it: there was a desire for it to be ‘monumental for St Neots’, for it to be awkward. And yet also its counter-intention is to represent the number of people, of occupants, who would have a stake in that, as a kind of stepping off point from their spare bedroom to something bigger. So it’s also a sponge-like building, or a building that’s designed to take everyone’s crap: 20 different firms starting up with their funny furniture. It needs to be generous for that sort of occupation. Its not for a single occupier, it felt like it needed a more open structure. Again, my model is in the Stirling world of bits, of putting stuff together from bits. I think he and Gowan certainly had a sense of the whole, which I think we are still looking for: ‘the style for the job’, something that appears very singular but is also interested in articulation or invention: you know, the funny hanging stairs at the Florey, or... one thinks of any number of examples from the ‘Red Series’

E - ‘The first work of yours that I knew of were some very beautiful house conversions that were published, with an obsessiveness about how two bits of wood were put together. But you’re also an architect who talks about work on a territorial scale, and there’s a point along that spectrum where one abandons certain preoccupations and becomes more effective in making more ruthless interventions in the world.’

T - ‘It’s true. Although a lot of those domestic projects were not really detailed: many were detailed on site in quite a contingent way, because they were always for clients who didn’t have quite enough money, but had a lot of ambition. We were always trying to do more than was strictly possible. We spent a lot of time on site with dodgy builders trying to just make...’
stuff happen. And I guess from that point, even the domestic projects came from a certain 'stageyness': my background was in the theatre, and stuff 'having to go on', even if you ran out of money, or there wasn't enough time, so there's always been an interest in pragmatism in that way. There's definitely a neurosis in the work, but there's an interest in just getting stuff together. I guess in a way there is an entrepreneurialism - in the older sense of the word, in the sense of putting something on, acting as an impresario, getting something to come off in a certain way.'

E - 'So that's where the ruthlessness is?'

T - 'That has its own ruthlessness. And it's maybe a ruthlessness that reflects an age where actually the architect has very little power in the dynamics of development or planning. But what you can do is put together fragments of 'what could be'... and hope that bits of it come off. It goes back to that thing about control: unless you have a status in the process - which I don’t think we really do anymore - what is it that you care about? It's about choosing your battles, and articulating those as well as you can.

Actually, one of the really interesting things we've been doing is in Soho, which is mostly crumby 18th century marshland property, now worth a fortune. Two things have happened, firstly, it's occupied by very high value media companies, who need to be in that location, but would probably be better off in an 'out of London' location: Pinewood Studios say, with soundstages and technical space. The other thing that's happened is conservation, which was actually a kind of co-product of the world we were talking about earlier, of the Smithson generation. On the one hand was that world of architects talking about tabula rasa or imposition, and the other product of that was saving Covent Garden and a very creative or politicised conservation. In Soho you can't go in and impose in the way that was possible in the 60s: so it has to be much more tactical and sequential.'

E - 'And can't demolish anything: everything is existing fabric'

T - 'You can't knock down anything. And so everything has to be on a basis of a narrative about value and how you can use the qualities of existing stuff, and how you might identify the soft tissue, where you can start to introduce stuff that's really needed by the people who are trying to occupy those structures. So projects in Soho, as with a lot of those college projects in Cambridge, have been about stuff that's incredible precious, both in terms of its institutional history, and in terms of what's too difficult to knock down, and being very pragmatic about stuff that works or is required, and isn't yet part of that picture. So how the modern and contemporary intersects with the existing is really deep in our culture in that way. You end up through that, negotiating little bits of stuff: ruins, that are kept, fabric that you really can’t damage any further, but you've damaged as much as you can. And then adding an intervention - something that's in dialogue.

E - 'St Neots maybe stands out as an oddity, but I think pretty much everything else I know of yours works with existing fabric.'

T - 'Well St Neots does too. I mean with its landscape: the fact it replaces a country house which was demolished in the 50s. It intends to re-make a relationship between a building and its lost landscape'

E - 'So everything's implicated somehow. You can think of celebrated architects who have never in their lives had those sort of conditions to work with: I mean I can maybe think of a couple of Richard Rogers buildings which deal with existing fabric, but it is a rarity. And is that a choice?'

T - 'Yeah definitely it's a choice, I mean it goes back to the whole thing about really finding the monofunctional, the univocal, a problem. And we've always found it more interesting to have a debate - even if it's a row - with stuff that's there, rather than construct our own autonomous reality. My problem with the whole idea of 'fuck context' is that actually it's really dull. Euralille is really dull...'20

E - 'but Euralille is dull not because it 'fucks context', but because there's not enough programme perhaps?!

T - 'Well, yeah, but there would be more programme if you started with some context! I think we’re more interested in the other side that Koolhaas talks about, which is the social condenser21:'
that you take everything that’s there, and all you do is add. The frustration is with autonomy: making your own reality is a real problem for 21st century architecture.'

E - ‘Well you can make your own reality, but maybe it has an antagonistic relationship to an existing situation: and at least that's a relationship.'

T - ‘Yes. For example, the Smithsons were wrong in so many places, but at least they were wrong in an interesting way, and it's a place to start from. Robin Hood Gardens would have been a fascinating location for a critique of all that, and everything we're doing is a critique of a different generation's idea of what planning was, or what architecture was.'

E - ‘And at the current culture of planning - the CABE-approved idea of what urban development might be - do you have a critical take on that? Do you feel a distance from what Allies & Morrison might do for example?'

T - ‘I guess there's a blandness to it which I find unchallenging.'

E - ‘Which is to do with the mantra about density?’

T - ‘Which is partly to do with the mantra about density: there's a sort of comfiness to it. I guess, as with Rogers, there’s a sort of lazy cosmopolitanism: that density on its own will create place. And that seems to me to be too close to the market – the laissez faire condition – and is just convenient to developers. Kollhoff, when he decides he's going to be dense, is dense in a sort of fairly uncompromising, purposeful manner. There's a density of program, rather than a density of floor plate. I think that's our frustration: it does lead to a very formalised way of planning that, with the Rogers' plan for Cambridge Station, becomes really problematic, and leads to ‘shorthand urbanism’: like station square, that doesn't seem to have any animation, but that has very dense corporate buildings all around it. And I guess that’s very different from the spikiness of a Smithson or Stirling building, which has a critical response to context. I don't know: it just seems a bit redolent or bland.'

E - ‘With Rogers' plan, one feels a sort of beaux-arts sensibility undercutting all the high-tech imagery, where there's a circus there and a building here, and there's one to match it on the other side. And actually one feels the masterplans are gigantic buildings. It's an urbanism at an architectural scale, while a New York grid plan is an urban idea: the barbershop and the skyscraper next door to each other. The plan can accommodate that, while the Rogers' plan can't accommodate difference in that way.'

T - ‘Your talk about the Manhattan grid and the barbers' shop makes me think about that Saul Bellow novella, Seize the Day: the way in which connection to authorship of the realization of just writing the equivalent of a short story for each of these projects, it's a really interesting way to think of one's role. One's also not just responding like a Pavlov's dog, waiting for the phone to ring. And of course looking back over all the projects and finding continuity between them is really good.'

E - ‘What is the time frame for the next bit of the process?'

T - ‘The projects have their own trajectory. The Car-park project starts and stops. So the relationship between the research and reality is not really controlled. But certainly the thinking is different. Just assembling stuff in the way the research process has dictated brings a kind of self consciousness, which has re-framed these three projects in a totally different way.'

E - ‘The project in Cambridge feels like something that will generate an architectural image most directly - the others feel like the outcomes will be maps and quite disparate analysis.'

T - ‘I don't know - the trick is always to find some mediation between the universal and particular: the North Cambridge project could generate some retrofitting hybrid infrastructures that we want to start drawing, about the urban edge, and the way you might see it as you drive into the city from points East, and then how you might deal with all these kind of technical issues that come together. That put together might generate the equivalent of Kahn's Philadelphia scale of consideration.

Even with the North Sea Dialogue project we want to look at the physical outcomes: implications on the ground at an immediate scale: what sorts of room come out of this critique? Or what could come out of this found reality?'
E - ‘Have you seen this publication that came out of TU Delft called ‘Over Holland’? It is very good at bridging between the territorial scale of investigation and local individual projects. They commissioned individual research projects from people like Office KGDVS, Neutlings Reidijk & other interesting Dutch academic practices, who are proposing speculative projects, grounded in a sense of reality for particular situations in relation to the railway system: it might be worth looking at as a sort of model. There’s a mapping element and there’s a proposition. I can imagine from your territorial scale work you are going to want bring it down to something feeling architectural. Maybe not but it feel like that’s an exciting possibility.

T – Railways are certainly rich territory: the way that East Anglian railways were extended into the territory as a sort of entrepreneurial way to make places.’

E - ‘Actually when one starts thinking at an infrastructural scale then there’s real political will that one can harness: these are projects that would win votes. Something like your Fatwalk project: if you could implant an idea like that into the public imagination then it’s got traction. But nobody feels that, in many of these schemes try to unpick some of the things from the 60’s you could find an incredible sort of weight of political/popular support.

T -‘In a way it’s a cultural question of finding confidence in being modern again, which was the case in the 60’s. So much of that was tainted subsequently, as you say, has been made problematic territory.’

E -‘The Highline is a good example isn’t it? An idea which, a very dramatic change to the city and found a popular support in a way that a more disparate idea about how to redevelop that territory might not.’

T -‘That’s really true. As with the ecology debate, these themes are so explicit in the US – wether you’re in a cabin on your own going through an autonomous condition of being in nature, which is one tradition -Thoreau’s Walden - or alternatively, you’re building infrastructure with the US Army Corps of Engineers.'
Notes

1. *Rural Rides*, written by the English pamphleteer William Cobbett in the 1820s, documented agrarian change caused by the agricultural revolution.


5. Eric de Maré (London, 1910-2002) was a British photographer who documented industrial settings. A journey through Britain documenting canal infrastructure resulted in a 1949 article for the *Architectural Review*


7. Saxl & Wittkower’s exhibition and accompanying book of the same title, *British Art and the Mediterranean* was held at the Warburg institute during the second world war.

8. Cambridge’s Science Park (1970) was based on the model of Stanford’s Industrial Park in Palo Alto from 1950.

9. *AS in DS*, Published in 1983 by Alison & Peter Smithson, records the drive from their London office to Upper Lawn, their Wiltshire cottage, contrasting the mechanical slickness of their Citroen DS19 to the picturesque countryside encountered on the journey.


11. BDP's iconic Preston Bus Garage was under threat of demolition at the time of this conversation.

12. See Michael Brawne, *Parking Terminals*; Architectural Review, August 1960

13. OMA's Zeebrugge Sea Terminal competition, 1989 “How to inject a new ‘sign’ into a landscape that, through scale and atmosphere alone, renders any object both arbitrary and inevitable? To become a landmark, this project adopts a form that resists easy classification to free associate with successive moods the mechanical, the industrial, the utilitarian, the abstract, the poetic, the surreal. It combines maximum artistry with maximum efficiency."
14. Hans Kollhoff Atlanpole competition proposal, 1988 Nantes, France. The competition brief was for a communications centre as the centrepiece of the developing high-tech hub in the Loire estuary economic zone, bringing together the local authority, university and commerce. Kolhoff stacked the programme vertically, as “a large house containing the whole of a city”. Floors 2 to 10 would house production areas; 11 to 15 would house exhibition spaces, 16 to 25 would be a hotel.


17. See Bureau Bas Smets: http://www.bassmets.be

18. ARU: landscape and urban design of the first phase of Paju Book City, a new ‘City of Publishing’ on a very large site next to the Han River north west of Seoul. 1999.

19. Design for London (2007-2012), and the Architecture and Urbanism Unit before it (2001 -2007), were exceptional clients and exemplify a more careful mode of urban planning.

20. OMA’s project in Euralille, 1994-2010.

21. Rem Koolhaas: Patent for a social condenser – from Content, accompanying plan of Parc de la Villette competition entry 1982. ‘Programmatic layering upon vacant terrain to encourage dynamic coexistence of activities and to generate through their interference unprecedented events’.

Three propositions have emerged directly in response to the research process and draw on a explicit interest in political engagement and advocacy. Each of these propositions has resulted in a physical publication, which has been used as a tool to attempt to establish a client and a project. As live projects they have each developed their own momentum, and degree of resolution, at the moment of writing.

At the largest scale, **North Sea Dialogues** is an observation on a trans-national landscape located around the littoral of the North Sea.

The landscapes of southeast England, north-eastern France, northern Belgium and Holland (and possibly northern Germany and western Denmark, where I have less experience of the territory) are undergoing huge transformation. These urban hinterlands are experiencing the creation of great monocultures, largely shaped by infrastructure. Little of this remarkable transformation is brought into a broader cultural discourse, and it is certainly not a pressing concern within the discipline of architecture, and yet we know - for instance from the field of ecology - that the creation of monocultures is fundamentally problematic.

**North Cambridge** emerged from a frustration with the lack of a positive and ambitious spatial vision for the growth of the city of Cambridge, in particular, the city's northern edge, which includes both Europe's first Science Park and the sewage works.

This document has been used to brief and canvas politicians, land owners, special interest groups, public bodies and key figures from the 'Cambridge Phenomenon' - the economy driven by the commercial application of the University's technological innovations.

**City Terrace** takes a core project involving an important city centre site - where we have a client and an appointment - and encourages the consideration of a much wider context, illuminating the potential of a larger staged project of urban renovation. This project, while it has a core client and is the most applied of the three, has evolved more slowly and is therefore less developed as a polemic.
3 works in progress
North Sea Dialogues

This document sets out a proposal for a ‘North Sea Dialogue’, with the aim of establishing a conversation between selected practices in the states bordering the North Sea who have an interest in large-scale strategy.

We have defined a trans-national common territory united by the North Sea, from the littoral back inland to the line of first motorway. This non-urban territory is undergoing huge change: perhaps on a scale not seen since the industrial revolution. Little reflecting that scale of change is evident in public discourse, or seen as a critical topic within the disciplines of architecture & urbanism.

The glow of Northern Europe's cities at night, © NASA

The cities of Northern Europe, are the locus of activity and discussion in the spatial design disciplines...
... yet these cities rely on a vast hinterland to service their needs, a territory which does not have a part in the discourse.

We are all, of course, familiar with the idea that our cities benefit from a ‘culture of congestion’ - from being ‘compact’ or ‘rich’...
Once our market towns and villages also had this rich quality - they were also spatially complex and multivalent....

...in contrast, our modern pastoral landscape is increasingly a sequence of monofunctional and highly determined technical spaces.

One could drive from Lincolnshire to Schleswig-Holstein through a recurrent sequence of logistics hubs, intensive farming, industrial agriculture, flood management systems and transport infrastructure.
Today’s ‘out of town’ shopping crisis - displacing town market centres to shopping ‘centres’ on the fringe - mirrors the nineteenth century’s displacement of farming from an activity that was central to the life of a village to something more abstract that occurred beyond the experience of most of the population.

...in rural areas particularly, the divide between wealth and poverty has widened. Millions have vacated the countryside for our cities.
Q.

What is the future of the northern European countryside: how will it be used, and how might this alter our perceptions of it?

While cities have absorbed the focus of architects and urbanists, the countryside becomes more and more abstracted from the experiences of most people.

The disconnection of the majority of Europe’s population from the sources of their food - to take one example - has caused anxiety and increasingly a movement towards reconnecting a more immediate relationship...

5th studio

(where are we coming from)

Our working territory has one of the greatest densities of infrastructure on the planet.

The spaces between London and the other towns and cities of South-East England are host to significant dramas of land use change.
RURAL RIDES

The English pamphleteer, William Cobbett recorded the depopulation of the countryside at the moment of the land enclosures.

In his polemic *Rural Rides*, Cobbett rode by horse around the country noting the upheavals in the landscape that presaged the industrial revolution.

We proposed a similar journey to structure the UK pavilion in the 2006 Venice Biennale...
...taking in major agents of change in the British landscape, from world heritage listing of former industrial sites, to the flux in London’s encircling Green Belt.

JITland

(Just In Time Logistics Land)

The cities of Northern Europe, are the locus of activity and discussion in the spatial design disciplines...
...and would ride not on a horse, but in the cab of a Norbert Dentressangle 18-wheeler

We’ve made a start

...thinking about the particularities of our own working area, East Anglia...
The UK city-region agenda...

The previous UK Government identified these economically active ‘city regions’ - shown as green on the map above.

....and the gaps between

We’ve realised that we are more interested in the conditions of the bits in between, hosts to massive change, and particular conflicts illustrated over the next few pages:
THE WOLD

British Sugar factory, after Constable

Solar Farm, © Paul Marriott Photography

Fen Farm Sun Park, Lincolnshire
THE WASH & FENS
A highly technical landscape with growing conflicts between nature conservancy and agribusiness.

THE BRECKS
Forestry Commission as energy producer...
This is a scaled mapping of how much of this land would be required for biomass as part of a mixed zero-carbon energy plan for the UK.

Plan M, Sustainable Energy - Without The Hot Air, David JC MacKay

COAST AND BROADS

Critical tensions between heritage / conservation and tourism. The Broads - created by industrial excavation are now a National Park - the embodiment of ‘nature’
...and the town facing to the west also, and open to the River, makes the finest quay in England, if not in Europe, not inferior even to that of Marseilles.'

Daniel Defoe  
Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain, 1724

...day trippers relax on the Great Yarmouth seafront - behind them, the Combined Cycle Gas Turbine power station.

Great Yarmouth's Town Quay harbour, an infrastructure which also played a civic role as the heart of the town.
£ 100 million + £10 million*

* to convert it after the initial business plan failed

Compare Defoe's description of Town Quay with the poverty of ambition demonstrated at Great Yarmouth's “Eastport” project—single issue engineering, obsolete before it was completed.

Great Yarmouth Outer Harbour - completed 2009

Stansted Mega Hub, © Make Architects

LONDON HUB
(formerly Stansted)

One of a series of shiny proposals for a new airport in the south east of the UK.
GREATER ESTUARY

From Constable's Suffolk idyll to the container port of Felixstowe.

London Gateway £1.5Bn, 12,000 jobs

DP World - London Gateway: an almost invisible, unheralded infrastructure project to construct an international container hub on the Thames.
Compare the vibrant urbanity of London's former Docklands to the engineered monoculture proposed by DP World.

‘THE GARDEN OF ENGLAND’
Britain's largest greenhouses, © Thanet Earth

Thanet Earth
32MW of electricity
c. 15% of UK salad vegetable crops
90 hectares, 500 jobs

the proposition
We propose investigating the common conditions of the North Sea margins - a powerhouse of the future European economy. Studying the existing landscapes and occupations for clues towards a prospective new pastoral condition.

an ideal territory to examine the potential of urbane infrastructure alongside the evolving role and landscape of the ‘countryside’
... through a series of dialogues / investigations - propositions that can be locally focussed but globally located producing specifically architectural knowledge of spatial phenomena. + an academic/research programme?
Potential sponsors?

Sponsorship of the project would come from attracting high-profile groups interested in framing a positive narrative for the evolving countryside through a period when they will be anticipating enormous change (and massive investment) in the region.

An invitation

We are interested in sharing common phenomena, and in understanding better what differentiates the experience of this territory - what is general? What is particular?

We propose that the resulting dialogue produces rich analysis and propositional work, perhaps through speculation, or through the agency of live projects in the territory. Practice work and research might be augmented by teaching studio input.

We hope that participating studios will help develop this proposal towards an influential, funded piece of research which shapes the future development of our shared landscape and develops a strong and prospective sense of a new pastoral condition.
Cambridge is a city experiencing unprecedented growth - great change is underway - but what is the vision for the shape of the city in the next half-century? What sort of place will it be like by 2050? What is the spatial strategy underpinning this vision?

Cambridge performs on a global stage of cities at the heart of a strong ‘knowledge economy’. It’s continuing role in this urban club, and its economic resilience, depend on the quality of the city’s environment: an ambitious sense of the sort of place it wants to be.

North Cambridge 2050

Part 1

An introduction to North Cambridge: its significance, issues and opportunities.
Many of the edges of the city are currently in the process of being re-made. Over the last ten years Cambridge has restructured the edgelands around the city: there are now few remaining places to accommodate growth. Given limited resources, where is it possible to plan effectively?

The one remaining city quarter still available for planning is the city's northern edge. Here land ownership structures and very low density of existing use means that change is possible, and planning can make an impact. It is also a critical location for the reinvention of the City's knowledge economy.

How might a strong vision for the next fifty years bring focus back to the Northern edge of the city, ensuring that current threats to the city's economic prominence and environment are addressed head on to ensure space for planned growth?

Land ownership in this quarter of the city are concentrated in relatively few long-term ownerships, thus allowing the prospect of a planned future. The creation of a Design Framework could ensure that these urban assets are used to maximum efficacy to build resilience and adaptability over time. This quarter of Cambridge could be made the most attractive place in the city to set up a new business, to work and to live.
These drawings compare the scale of the North Cambridge quarter with Cambridge’s historic core and the expansion of the University in the city's North West.

It is clear that there is a substantial opportunity for the city to expand here over the long term, and that this part of Cambridge has sufficient land for much of the city's employment and residential expansion space, without the need for further encroachment into the greenbelt.
Through study and analysis we have sought to uncover the latent landscape, infrastructural and social capital of the site.

This background is summarised over the following pages...

Zoning? Rich Mix!

In the 1950s the planner, William Holford, imagined keeping the city in aspic, with a maximum population of 100,000 surrounded by greenbelt. While the city was physically contained and preserved, it changed dramatically in terms of its demographics, as did the wider city region beyond the greenbelt. Gordon Logie - the City’s powerful Chief Planner in the 1960s - imagined a zoned city: the university, a residential population, and a band of industry along the railway and new ringroad. This plan still influences the shape of the city today.

The sense of a divided urban culture now seems at odds with the more intertwined lives we live. The most successful cities blend and hybridise work, social interaction and family life. A zoned city seems an antiquated notion...

A framework for change

As previous plans illustrate, long-term planning needs to be resilient, allowing adaptation for changing circumstances and the unforeseen. A formal physical plan soon becomes obsolete. What we propose is the establishment of an overarching strategy which is built on a deep understanding of the found conditions of a place - North Cambridge - and its particular spatial possibilities.

From that understanding of potential, we propose to establish a design framework which sets out objectives: what might top-down elements such as infrastructure catalyse for example? What are the big moves that need to happen to allow bottom-up initiative, and more contingent development to take hold? How can development be guided (catch & steer) towards realising maximal potential?
In 2015, a new railway station will open, providing a fast link to London and beyond. Hard-won, this station will provide critical new infrastructure to the north of the city, in an area which is the last opportunity for major urban growth. The station will act as a catalyst for long-term change, but arrives in a strategic vacuum. The opportunity to trigger a vital re-appraisal of the potential of the city's northern edge is in danger of being missed.

North Cambridge is a meeting point, a hinge between two great landscape assets. Firstly, the River Meadows alongside the Cam, connecting Fen Ditton with Grantchester, and providing a towpath cycle connection to the historic Centre. Secondly, the closest point the fenland gets to the city. This ribbon of fenland is to be reinforced by the National Trust's ambitious project to extend the fen from Wicken, creating an extensive landscape resource. These extensive landscapes can be seen as a Green infrastructure, creating connectivity. Reinforcing landscape connections would allow a cycle-priority route connecting North Cambridge with the city's historic core as well as with other critical locations.

Transport infrastructure

In 2015, a new railway station will open, providing a fast link to London and beyond. Hard-won, this station will provide critical new infrastructure to the north of the city, in an area which is the last opportunity for major urban growth. The station will act as a catalyst for long-term change, but arrives in a strategic vacuum. The opportunity to trigger a vital re-appraisal of the potential of the city's northern edge is in danger of being missed.
North Cambridge has the greatest concentration of infrastructure in the city. This is where Cambridge's power arrives via the National Grid. The city's sewage flows here, as does solid waste, en route to landfill at Milton or to be sorted and recycled in Waterbeach. This concentration of infrastructure has created a blight on the land, and results in a fragmented and problematic territory which is hard to traverse, particularly from east to west. More intensive use of the site will require this infrastructure to bring benefit rather than restraint.

**City infrastructure = carbon zero**

Compared to other ‘peer cities’, Cambridge has a paucity of loose-fit post-industrial spaces to house start up companies. What there is broadly follows the rail-line, where much of this workspace fabric is owned and managed by the City Council. This ribbon of start-up space across the city could be acknowledged, and reinforced with more studios and other low-cost adaptable spaces, including associated cultural infrastructure. Indeed, the city must encourage the development of space for this inventive economy, in order to reinforce against the threat of becoming a London dormitory.

**Space for creativity**
A global stage...

A Global Ribbon of High Tech Hubs

...experienced locally

Since the 1950s, the ‘Cambridge Cluster’ has been an important driver of the UK economy. Over the next decade the University is expected to contribute nearly £60bn to GDP (some 4% of total GDP), and will create a significant number of jobs.

However, the growth of the Cambridge cluster is not assured and a number of threats face its future health. Critically, the physical fabric does not actively support interaction, serendipity - and the lack of social infrastructure does not make these environments attractive to the world’s brightest creative thinkers.
SCIENCE CITY
Trail-blazing the urban intensification of the periphery to provide a world-class location for business and living.

INTEGRATED TRANSPORT HUB
An integrated regional transport hub - with a public transport interchange accessible from the strategic highway network - forming the heart of a new urban district

LANDSCAPE/INFRASTRUCTURE
Renewal of infrastructure on the northern edge as an opportunity to create an exemplary city support infrastructure, generating low carbon energy and opening areas of countryside to public access and enjoyment.

A co-ordinated strategy...

Strengthening the cluster...

...through establishing a spatial identity at the city-scale...
Quantum - a new centre

The site is currently occupied at a very low density, which increasingly seems a wasteful use of land resources in relation to pressures elsewhere in the city. The proximity to what will be a major transport interchange creates the potential for a much higher density of development, creating a well connected edge-centre to complement the constrained historic core.

The numbers opposite are indicative and for discussion, but they illustrate the potential scale of the opportunity.

Creating more ‘city’ at this location, with all the associated benefits, could also strengthen the protection and identity of the greenbelt.
The Science Park at 50

The Science Park is approaching fifty years old, and facing a number of threats to its continuing primacy as the centre of the ‘Cambridge Cluster’.

Many things have changed since 1970, not least the appearance of alternative locations for innovative start-up. Silicone Fen competes globally for investment. Societal change means that the 1950s Palo Alto model that informed the original Science Park requires revisiting to maintain relevance. Luckily, relatively low-density use of land means that there is plenty of space for growth.

Hybrid infrastructure

From an extensively occupied site that has been shaped and given over to monocultures of utilities, the opportunity lies in marshalling major change to reshape these infrastructures to get more from their interaction. Hybridisation would make an alliance between an underlying landscape, which shapes urban form, creates beautiful park spaces, and manages sustainable drainage.

A ‘utility belt’ converts the city’s waste into heat and power, while making a city wall against the A14 - a positive, picturesque edge to the greenbelt.
Urban quality & a ‘rich mix’

Higher density, a street-based urbanism and a richer mix of uses could retrofit existing environments, creating over time a city quarter of a quality to appear on indexes of ‘most livable cities’ - a signal piece of urbanism.

Strong landscape edges

A strengthened city edge perceived from the A14.
We propose that a Design Framework be commissioned collectively by principal landowners and other key stakeholders.

To date 5th Studio have invested more than £14,000 in research, analysis - and promotion of the initiative.

If each of the parties identified here contributed of the order of £10,000, a reasonable budget for the development and presentation of a collective vision for the site could be reached.

An invitation
5th studio
Cambridge is a city experiencing unprecedented growth: great change is underway.

The city’s edges are being re-made through the process of urban expansion. As the city grows, how do the new developments on the urban fringe affect the centre?

As land values soar, what are the implications for the density and use of critical central spaces?

We are interested in exploring these questions in the context of Parker's Piece, one of the city’s principle green spaces, which has itself shifted over time from an edge condition to occupy a position at the centre of the city.

Now at the heart of Cambridge, Parker’s Piece has acted as an extraordinary locus for civic activities since it passed into city ownership in the 17th Century.
The growth of the city has gradually shifted Parker's Piece from the city's edge to the centre of Cambridge.
The 1830 map captures Parker’s Piece in transition from agricultural land to the beginnings of an urban event space. Part of the Middle Field, on the border between city and country, this area of Cambridge was the first to experience the effects of the Enclosures Act (1811). As a marker of its marginal condition, this is the location for the city’s hospital (A), and gaol (B).

A view from the 1840s illustrates a cricket match, enclosed by the castle-like gaol and the eponymous windmill of Mill Road, the first indication of the infrastructure of the city’s dramatic expansion to the east.

By 1886 the ‘New Town’ suburb is well-established and the long-resisted railway station has arrived to the east, creating a new pole for the city’s urban expansion.

Parker’s Piece has been formally laid out, and latent infrastructure is in place for the suburb of Petersfield. The Gaol has been demolished, and the University Cricket Ground established to the east.

Villas have been built along the northern edge of Parker’s Piece. The city’s first hotel has been built on the southwest corner, and elm trees planted around its edge.
The 1838 coronation feast, viewed from the battlements of the gaol. The central mast is later immortalised by the erection, through public subscription, of a central lamppost, which has become known as ‘Reality Checkpoint’.

Panorama of the North Side of Parker’s Piece with two elements of a public building programme dating from the 1960s - the Police Station(left) and Fire Station (right). The latter has now been demolished and replaced with a much denser mixed development: an indicator of the next wave of flux.
Development completely encloses the Piece by the early twentieth century. The Town Gaol was demolished following the Prison Act of 1876. In its place, Queen Anne Terrace was built, providing an early college for women (1881).

Civic cluster

The 1960s bring great change, with a number of civic buildings locating around the Piece - including a post sorting office (1963), fire station (1963), swimming pool (1963) and police station (1968-70).

Queen Anne Terrace is demolished and replaced with the sports hall, multi-storey car park (1971) and the YMCA (1974).
In the 1960s, Gonville Place, on the eastern edge of Parker’s Piece, was re-imagined as a major thoroughfare: the Inner Relief Road. Although only partly realised, the land for the road was safeguarded and has blighted development until recently, when the plans were finally abandoned.

This plan was drawn up by the powerful city architect & planner Gordon Logie as part of an ambitious vision for the Future Shape of Cambridge.

Logie’s vision included an elevated ‘Main Town Road’ on the periphery, that would provide capacity for the radical increase in vehicle numbers, imagining the urban centre as freed up for civic use.

The partner of this urban road system was a necklace ring of multi-storey car-parks. The car parks were imagined as structures to transform the motorist into an active citizen:

“Parking structures are like terminals; like the great railway sheds of the nineteenth century, they are points of interchange between two forms of movement – on the one side the private motor car, on the other the pedestrian, public transport, lifts escalators, moving pavements. Car parks are the focal points which must be the origin and destination of private urban motoring.”

Michael Brawne, ‘Parking Terminals’; Architectural Review, August 1960
The buildings along Gonville Place today seem to have little sense of coherence in the way they address this extraordinary urban space. The sports hall and car park have a blind facade and a poor connection to Parker’s Piece.

Together with the YMCA, these building are in urgent need of renewal - each requires significant maintenance, and yet the present built fabric offers little opportunity for adaptation and expansion.

The 1960s fire station was recently replaced by a development which has greatly increased the density of the site. A replacement fire station has been wrapped by a hundred dwellings, a café and offices. This increase in density, and the mixed typology are an indicator of the site’s new urban centrality.
Gonville Place saw little development until the C19 and the most significant building along it by 1830 was the Town Gaol. However, by 1886, the construction of large houses with landscaped gardens turned the street in a fashionable residential area. Some of these houses were replaced during the 1960s and 1970s, and the street now forms part of the very busy ring road.

The YMCA (marked in red), the sports hall and car park, and the roof of the town's swimming pool. Together these buildings establish a poor edge to Parker's Piece and a unresolved relationship with the road that separates them from the green.

The City Council's Local Plan identifies the desirability of the holistic reinvention of the eastern edge of Parker's Piece, including the car park, sports hall and YMCA.
Analysis of the grain of ownership and use around Parker’s Piece indicates that the major potential for flux is along Gonville Place - here land ownership is more singular, and the existing buildings are large and of poor quality. If densification is inevitable, a guiding vision needs to be established for the city to get the most from the remaking of this important urban edge...
We propose a **City Terrace**, with a rich mix of uses, retaining a strong civic role on the site, and perhaps even creating a new Town Hall.

A design framework would allow development to be staged over time, but would establish how each component contributes to a coherent edge to Parker’s Piece, repairing the relationship between terrace, road and landscape.
On Infrastructure

A Conversation with Shelley McNamara, Grafton Architects
Shelley McNamara graduated from the School of Architecture in UCD in 1974, where she began teaching in 1976. With Yvonne Farrell, she founded Grafton Architects in 1978. Grafton were founder members of Group ‘91 Architects, winners of the International Competition for the Regeneration of Temple Bar, Dublin.

Grafton Architects are winners of numerous international awards including the World Building of the Year Award 2008 for their building for the Universita Luigi Bocconi in Milan. They are currently working on the commission for the construction of the new School of Economics for University Toulouse 1 Capitole and a New University Campus for UTEC Lima in Peru.

This exchange took place through email between January and March 2013, following a number of conversations. During that period, Shelley delivered a lecture at the Architectural Association, London, entitled Architecture as New Geography. The interview was published on my blog Infra_action.

The conversation forms part of the process of defining a potential bridge between the scales of infrastructure and architecture in my own work.
Tom Holbrook:

I'm interested in why the qualities of infrastructure are so resonant in the thinking of certain architects, including our own work!

I first came across this tendency in your work when I saw Yvonne Farrell lecturing on the building you completed for Bocconi University, Milan. What it is about the infrastructural scale that Grafton find so compelling? What are the roots of that fascination?

Shelley McNamara:

A number of things and influences come to mind in relation to this. I remember reading an essay by Stan Allen many years ago where he was describing the qualities of 'architecture as infrastructure'. He says something like "infrastructures are flexible and anticipatory...they work with time and are open to change...by specifying what must be fixed and what is open to change they can be precise and indeterminate at the same time" (We used this quote in our Bocconi competition report).

We were fascinated by this idea of the possibility of making buildings which might not be completely prescriptive or finished. Walter Benjamin also talks about “the capacity of certain structures to act as a scaffold for a complete series of events not anticipated by the architect.” I have not investigated the connection between these influences and that of the Smithson’s definition of a ‘conglomerate’ in that essay Conglomerate Ordering in their book *Italian Thoughts*. I must look at that piece again.

And on a different note and even further back in time, probably around 1977, I remember being completely intrigued by an essay written by Alan Colquhoun in a book called *Le Corbusier in Perspective*, which I have just miraculously put my hand on! The title of the essay is *Formal and Functional Interactions*. He compares the French Embassy project in Brasilia with the Venice Hospital project. From memory, at least what I took from this essay, was that Corb had a dynamic ‘form free’ way of organising space irrespective of whether he was proposing an ‘object’ type building like the Embassy as opposed to the more organic open form of the Hospital. The term infrastructure is not used here I think, but many of the qualities in Stan Allen’s essay would relate to the Venice Hospital project in particular.

So in a sense I think our interest in infrastructure does not initially come from dealing with the large scale but more from a characteristic that a project might have, and from the liberation that the ideas inherent in the term infrastructure could bring to design of a building at whatever scale perhaps.

In terms of the big scale, projects that catapulted us into this realm would probably be those of the Brazilian Architects I referred to in the AA lecture. We were inspired by the spatial potential of large scale structures. That together with the fact that we have worked with structural engineers on the design of motorway bridges.
Somehow when we were making a plan or section of a bridge, and physically experiencing the huge dimensions of the elements of column and beam, it shifted and focussed our awareness of structure.

But the Brazilian architects, especially Vilanova Artigas can make a tennis club or house feel like a bridge!

And of course there is the capacity within thinking about ‘infrastructure’ of getting away from the isolated object as the only intention...that idea of connecting to the bigger context, supporting or contributing to the bigger context, and architecture as something that can underpin and support human endeavour.

TH

I think it’s really interesting that you go directly to the issue of determinacy – architectural culture seems to be going through a period where so much revolves around formal issues and an over-determinacy of form.

At a research seminar last year, John Tuomey said that while he once subscribed to Hermann Czech’s notion of ‘architecture as background’ he was now convinced that his interest lay in an architecture of ‘vital presence’. Are the qualities of a strongly characterised, yet ‘unfinished’ infrastructure a means of achieving both? I am struck by the way the Bocconi can be so muscular, and yet at the same time can become so localised, so much part of an everyday Milanese street corner.

Your reference to the Smithson's notion of ‘Conglomerate Ordering’ is revealing – Peter Smithson illustrates what they were referring to with the analogy of ‘building like a farmer’: with each element expected to act in a multiple way, both field boundary and shelter, and so on. It also urges a more visceral relationship with built form, which resonates with both your buildings and your references to projects by Bo Bardi, Vilanova Artigas and Mendes da Rocha.

The liberation that the notion of infrastructure from a completed position to something more anticipatory brings to mind Rem Koolhaas' essay on urbanism from S,M,L,XL:

“If there is to be a “new urbanism” it will not be based on the twin fantasies of order and omnipotence; it will be the staging of uncertainty; it will no longer be concerned with the arrangement of more or less permanent objects, but with the irrigation of territories with potential; it will no longer aim for stable configurations but for the creation of enabling fields... it will no longer be about meticulous definition, the imposition of limits, but about expanding notions, denying boundaries... it will no longer be obsessed with the city but with the manipulation of infrastructure for endless intensifications and diversifications, shortcuts and redistributions – the reinvention of psychological space.”

Koolhaas' infrastructure inevitably irrigates what for him is a tabula rasa, while you seem interested in a more engaged and urban milieux. To what extent does ‘Architecture as a New Geography’ or the interest in infrastructure as a mediatory position differ from urbanism?
I find your questions and comments extremely interesting. I agree with John Tuomey's comment about architecture having a 'vital presence' but I am not sure that this rules out the 'architecture as background' idea.

I love an essay by Alvaro Siza on 'Making Walls'. He talks about the wall of the Monasterio de San Paio de Antealtares, in Santiago de Compostela. He says something like "a magnetic and vibrant wall finishing the square, wavers between nothing and magnetic presence" ...it makes him angry because it has such presence and yet it is just a virtually solid wall with what must be one of the longest public benches imaginable.

Is that a piece of infrastructure?

The difference between the Smithsons' Conglomerate Ordering and Rem Koolhaas' interpretation of 'infrastructure' for me, is that the Smithson's make the case that the specificity of a building is actually the quality that makes it generic and flexible! I love this idea in terms of urban forms and typology. Stan Allen's definition of infrastructures would also be close to the Smithson's view.

The idea of infrastructure being related to the tabula rasa actually frightens me. We think about it in a completely different way as I will try to describe in answer to your final question;

"To what extent does 'Architecture as New Geography', or the interest in infrastructure as a mediatory position, differ from urbanism?"

Architecture as new geography, for us, relates directly to urbanism. It is the idea that we as architects have the responsibility to build places and spaces which have a richness which can somehow compensate for the fact that so much of the natural world is disappearing, and more and more people are living in cities. It is also the idea that architecture grows out of physical and cultural ground.

An architectural 'infrastructure' can 'hold' culture. It is not neutral. It might be big but it needs to also have spaces which engender intimacy, security, identity, conviviality, community.

Hugh Campbell writing about Bocconi encouragingly says

"the heroic scale and sureness of purpose of the architecture transfers itself to the occupants, so that they too feel bound together, part of some larger social order".

By virtue of the sheer scale of many urban developments, architecture IS at the scale of pieces of geography. We need to make spaces where inhabitants can tell where they are, the time of day and the seasons. Not much to ask for?!

Paolo Mendes Da Rocha is good on this....he says: "we need to get architecture out of making and thinking of isolated objects and show it as an inexorable transformation of nature".

I remember that great lecture you gave in UCD and your sense of geography, landscape, and the delicate balancing of intervention with the given conditions. You showed a depth of knowledge, sensitivity and awareness which was really admirable and enviable.

So we are talking about the same thing I hope!
Conclusion: Between Furniture & Infrastructure
Conclusion

In explicitly identifying the underlying motivations in our work, I wish to develop a mode of future practice which builds on the foundation of an effective broad disciplinary approach, acknowledging the necessity of political and social dimensions, and the power of acting as a generalist. I have attempted here to articulate more precisely the particular knowledge and innovation we bring, and the nature of its value to others.

Many of the projects assembled in this document embody a profound frustration with the homogeneity of contemporary urban space, and the processes by which the environments around us are conceived and formed. In the UK at least - but I believe more widely - the discipline of architecture is steadily diminishing in breadth, and we seem close to a nadir in terms of the societal appreciation of planning as the spatial extension of social or political policy.

As with any point of crisis, there is an opportunity - an urgency - to open new discourses around spatial practice, and to regain lost ground.

Where We Work

Through the course of the research it has become evident that there are characteristic locations to which 5th Studio are drawn, and that the body of work exhibits surprisingly consistent continuities beyond the trajectories of individual projects.

Almost invariably, the practice finds itself operating on the periphery, or along a boundary condition between two worlds - in border country - arriving there often in advance of a client agency, or a defined program. We arrive there with a hunch that the location in question (whether discovered independently, pitched for via competition or other procurement process) has contemporary relevance and is about to become a theatre of activity.

Such a theatre is characterised by division: it has physical complexity, infrastructural fragmentation, historical or occluded significance and often a normalised or sublimated underlying violence.

These locations are eclectic, spanning from a littoral ring of trans-national provisioning territories bordering the North Sea, through to the potential inherent in the front arcade of a Hawksmoor college quad in Oxford. They are significant as they are precisely the field of operations on which cities will need to address the environmental challenges facing them in the future.
The Knowledge we Produce

From an instinctive, tacit attraction to location, what follows is a research period that aims to uncover the intrinsic qualities of the place in question, both evident and concealed, physical & phenomenal. This work pays attention to the way the landscape got to be the way it is and how this offers clues to inform the particular qualities of how it might evolve further.

This research towards a ‘connoisseurship of place’ is always interwoven with an emergent design proposition, and results in a negotiative, discursive narration of how a place could evolve over time towards an environment which is more fulfilling for human occupation. Such an environment rests on a belief in the ability of rich places to be multivalent: to become, in a key phrase for the practice, more than the sum of their parts.

The roles that develop out of these highly complex projects respond to quick changes in scales of thinking, from the strategic to the concrete and back again. They also respond to the trajectory of the project, from the extended timescales inherent in landscape to the can-do skills of the expedient and opportunistic.

At the heart of this approach is the sense that strategy and large-scale planning can bring coherence, but that this is conditional on a bridge being established between strategic direction and the concrete manifestation of that large scale thinking on the ground. The synthetic interplay of all three modes of knowledge, from the tacit, to the encyclopaedic, to the practical, is necessary for the resilience and value of the work.

The research demonstrates that we have developed our spatial thinking to achieve this bridge between strategy and detail: from the scale of furniture to that of infrastructure. As evidenced through a number of case studies, this approach is able to orientate and bring meaning to highly complex and conflicted sites through sustained and committed involvement. The work is radically contextual, while preserving sufficient buoyancy to act effectively.
The Duty of Care

Engagement in the research programme has had an unexpected but stimulating denouement: the discovery that much of our work, and modes of working, arise from an unease with the orthodoxies of town planning and the regimes of development. Through a variety of ways, the projects described in this catalogue seek to subvert those orthodoxies, and to find tactics of resistance to allow us to operate despite them.

From that experience has evolved a highly political mode of practice, and the emergent realisation that what is being re-stated through the work is a concern with the nature of professional knowledge and the social contract implied in that.

We have told our clients that, as part of our involvement, we commit to the success of our projects, and the case studies discussed here can be seen as the establishment of regimes of care: a commitment to a place which one could describe as a form of husbandry. I believe that this attitude has profound resonance with the challenges emerging from deep ecological thinking, which looks as much to social justice and ethics as it does to the spheres of technology and management.

The spectrum of knowledge and the innovations in communication developed for a project like the Lea River Park, map precisely onto Leon Van Schaik’s tripartite definition of what it is to be a professional: that firstly there is custody of an autonomous body of knowledge that is maintained and advanced; that this body of knowledge is actively deployed to practical effect, and finally that there is a duty of care - a social contract extending beyond the limits of the project commission.

The critique of contemporary development and planning at the beginning of Chapter Four identifies the problematic dimensions of current orthodoxies, in terms of both process and outcome. In a number of ways, the body of work discussed in this catalogue has sought to restate the critical importance of synthetic spatial knowledge which should lie at the heart of the discipline.

It is useful to contrast this synthetic knowledge to that encountered in the multidisciplinary combines who are so prominent and commercially successful at the scale of work with which we seek to engage.

The multidisciplinary model privileges the instrumental knowledge of engineering, and the managerial routines of traditional planning and project management. The model depends not on synthesising different sorts of knowledge from within the discipline, but rather the consensually mute operation of diverse specialists contributing to the demands of a particular project without overarching synthetic authorship.

While no doubt operating within the legal definition of the duty of care, the closed system thinking of specialists maps very easily to the emergent tasks of late capitalist environments: the establishment of privatised and invisible infrastructures and controlled, risk-managed versions of what would have been the public realm.

If the model of multidisciplinary consultancy is a consequence of increasing corporate power, the weakening of the social contract matches the fragility of the concept of a vital civil society, the health of which would be signalled by participatory infrastructures and agonic public space.

These phenomena have been well documented in other disciplines - particularly the social sciences - but remain little acknowledged in the professional associations and institutions of architecture and urban design. While the research demonstrates the value of our work as tenacious project champions one has to acknowledge that this role is currently at odds with the values and processes of contemporary procurement. I believe that it is incumbent upon us to catch up with what is at stake and to restate the value of our spatial intelligence. The capacity of the projects discussed in the research show a way to that end.

1 Leon Van Schaik, Spatial Intelligence 2008.
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